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PUBLIC OPINION AND THE PANAMA CANAL TREATIES OF 1977

TED J. SMITH III AND
J. MICHAEL HOGAN

Abstract In April 1978, after nine months of national debate, the Senate narrowly ratified new Panama Canal treaties. Voting was apparently influenced by numerous opinion polls, which were seen as showing increased support for the treaties. But several analysts have shown that this interpretation was erroneous; public opinion consistently opposed the treaties. This study attempts to determine what went wrong. It begins by arraying and analyzing all national poll results on the topic in order to establish a coherent picture of public opinion. It then identifies a number of polling and reporting practices which may have contributed to the misinterpretation of the findings. The study concludes with recommendations for alleviating these problems.

On 6 September 1977, Presidents Jimmy Carter of the United States and Omar Torrijos of Panama met in Washington to sign two new treaties governing the status of the Panama Canal. The first, known as the Panama Canal Treaty, acknowledged Panama's sovereignty over the Canal Zone and provided for the United States to gradually shift complete control of the Canal to Panama by the year 2000. The second, known as the Neutrality Treaty, provided for a permanent regime of neutrality after the year 2000.

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Ratification of the treaties was in doubt from the outset. But they were approved by the Foreign Relations Committee in January, and consideration by the full Senate began on 8 February 1978. Over two months later, after the second longest treaty debate in history, both were ratified by identical 68–32 votes, just one vote more than the required two-thirds majority. Most observers agree that two amendments to the Neutrality Treaty were crucial in securing even this narrow margin of approval. Known as the "leadership amendments," they were intended to clarify U.S. rights to defend the neutrality of the Canal and to have priority passage in military emergencies after the year 2000.

Opinion polls figured prominently in the Senate's decision to ratify the amended treaties. Although early polls all showed widespread opposition to the pacts, treaty supporters claimed that a number of later polls showed a dramatic "turnabout" in public opinion. As Moffett (1985:114) has argued, these later findings apparently "provided the critical margin of safety for undecided senators hard-pressed by vocal opponents of ratification at home." More specifically, the "turnabout" was attributed to the leadership amendments and the success of efforts to "educate" the public about provisions of the treaties. Conservative senators vigorously contested this interpretation of polling results. But as Hogan (1985:311) has argued, the pro-treaty portrait of public opinion prevailed, "influencing the procedures and the outcome of the Senate debate."

Unfortunately, it appears that this pro-treaty interpretation was wholly erroneous. After examining 23 polls for evidence of "trends," Roshco (1978:562) concluded: "The trend that was confirmed most strongly could have been graphed with a straight horizontal line." Similarly, Moffett (1985:116) determined from a study of 34 polls that "public opinion on the Panama Canal treaties remained almost completely static. Despite one of the most extensive public relations efforts undertaken on any foreign-policy issue in American history, public attitudes never budged."

These conclusions are deeply disturbing. They suggest that the primary result of extensive professional polling on a major foreign policy issue was the massive misinterpretation of public opinion and, arguably, frustration of the public will. This essay attempts to discover what went wrong. It begins by arraying and analyzing the results of all national opinion polls on the Panama Canal conducted during the period of June 1975 through November 1978. Polling practices and the coverage of survey results in six national news media are then examined in order to determine how they may have contributed to erroneous interpretations. The essay concludes with recommendations on how

pollsters and journalists might avoid the problems described in the analysis.

Polls on the Panama Canal

At least[1] 42 nationwide surveys, fielded by ten different pollsters, provide evidence of American attitudes about the Panama Canal in the period 1975–1978. These polls have been the subject of two detailed studies; both are problematic. Roshco's analysis (1978) is accurate and perceptive but incomplete. He reports results from only 23 polls, omits mention of some questions from these, and offers no systematic framework for interpreting the full set of findings. Moffett's study (1985) is more comprehensive and provides an analytical system for categorizing questions by content. Again, however, a number of polls and questions are omitted. More important, his discussion is flawed by numerous and often serious errors of fact, analysis, and interpretation.[2] These concerns suggest the need to begin discussion with a description and analysis of all available findings on the topic.

Table 1 presents the responses to 51 questions asked in 42 nationwide surveys.[3] It includes all items designed to measure level of approval of either the Panama Canal treaties or the concept of ceding the Canal to Panama. Excluded are questions about the issues involved, measures of attitudinal intensity and salience, and ratings of congressional and presidential performance.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Table 1 is the great diversity of results it displays. The responses vary from 78%–8% disapproval (ORC item 8) to 65%–25% support (NBC item 26b). In the single month of February 1978, during the height of the Senate debate, findings ranged from 72%–19% against to 54%–40% in favor. Nevertheless, a very rough temporal pattern can be discerned. Specifically, nearly all (25 of 27) items asked prior to January 1978 showed opposition to the

1. It is difficult to be certain of the exact number of polls conducted. We are confident that the 42 polls discussed here represent all published and all or nearly all unpublished national surveys on the topic.

2. These criticisms are documented in Smith and Hogan (1985:7–8), which is available as ERIC Document ED 264 630.

3. Space limitations preclude giving the text of each question in Table 1. These may be found in Smith and Hogan (1985:10–18). All information about these polls has been confirmed by original news releases, Roper Center data, or direct contact with the pollster. The only exceptions are the five Caddell items. Repeated attempts to verify them were unsuccessful, and so it has been necessary to rely on Roshco (1978) and Moffett (1985) in these instances. Items in Table 1 are ordered by date of first interview and, within surveys, by the actual sequence in which they were asked.

Table 1. National Polls on the Panama Canal Treaties[a]

Item	Date	Poll[b]	Sample[c]	Type[d]	Results (%)			Error		Ambiguity		Bias	
					Pro	Con	Other	Pro	Con	Pro	Con	Pro	Con
1a	Jun 75	ORC	Full	Ia	12	66	22				X		X
1b	Jun 75	ORC	Full	IIa	29	48	23				X		X
2	Apr 76	ORC	Full	Ia	12	75	13				X		X
3	May 76	CBS/NYT	Full	Ib	24	52	24	X			X		
4	Jun 76	Roper	Full	IIb	26	46	28			X			
5	Jun 76	CBS/NYT	Full	Ib	22	57	21	X			X		
6	Jan 77	Roper	Full	IIb	24	53	23			X			
7	Mar 77	YSW	Full	III	29	53	18	X			X		
8	May 77	ORC	Full	Ia	8	78	14				X		X
9	May 77	Caddell	Full?	IIa	27	51	22				X		X
10	Aug 77	NBC	Full	IIa	27	55	18	X			X		
11	Aug 77	Gallup	Full	III	34	42	24	X					X
			Aware	III	37	47	16	X					X
			Unaware	III	24	27	49	X					X
12	Aug 77	Roper	Full	IIb	28	44	28			X			
13	Sep 77	Caddell	Full?	IIa	26	49	25	X					
14	Sep 77	Harris	Full	IIa	26	51	23	X					
15	**Sep 77**	**AP**	**Full**	**IIa**	**29**	**50**	**21**						
16	Sep 77	Roper	Full	IIb	27	53	20			X			
17	Sep 77	Gallup	Full	III	36	46	19					X	
			Aware	III	40	48	12					X	
			Unaware	III	23	39	38					X	
18	**Oct 77**	**Caddell**	**Full?**	**IIb**	**30**	**55**	**15**						
19	Oct 77	NBC	Aware	IIa	30	61	9						X
20a	**Oct 77**	**CBS/NYT**	**Full**	**IIa**	**29**	**49**	**22**						
20b/a	Oct 77	CBS/NYT	Full	III	63	24	13			X			
21	Oct 77	RSA	Full	IIa	28	59	13						X
22a	Oct 77	Roper	Split	IIb	31	50	19			X			
22b	**Oct 77**	**Roper**	**Split**	**III**	**33**	**47**	**20**						

23a	**Dec 77**	**Caddell**	**Full?**	**IIa**	**26**	**53**	**21**						
23b	Dec 77	Caddell	Full?	III	49	30	21			X			
24	Jan 78	Gallup	Full	III	43	37	20					X	
			Aware	III	45	42	13					X	
			Unaware	III	34	16	50					X	
25	**Jan 78**	**CBS/NYT**	**Full**	**IIa**	**29**	**51**	**20**						
26a	Jan 78	NBC	Aware	IIa	28	62	10						X
26b	Jan 78	NBC	Aware	III	65	25	10			X			
27	Jan 78	RSA	Full	IIa	35	55	10						X
28	Feb 78	Caddell	Full?	III	47	37	16			X			
29a	**Feb 78**	**Harris**	**Full**	**IIb**	**31**	**40**	**29**						
29b/c	Feb 78	Harris	Full	III	38	33	29	X				X	
30	Feb 78	ORC	Full	Ia	19	72	9				X		X
31	Feb 78	NBC	Aware	III	54	40	6			X			X
32a	Mar 78	Harris	Full	III	49	41	10					X	
32b	**Mar 78**	**Harris**	**Full**	**IIa**	**29**	**60**	**11**						
32c/d	Mar 78	Harris	Full	III	44	39	17	X				X	
33	Mar 78	NBC	Aware	IIa	35	55	10					X	
34a	**Apr 78**	**CBS/NYT**	**Full**	**IIa**	**30**	**53**	**17**						
34b	Apr 78	CBS/NYT	Full	III	51	35	14					X	
35	**Apr 78**	**Harris**	**Full**	**IIb**	**37**	**44**	**19**						
36	May 78	NBC	Full	III	47	42	11					X	
37	May 78	YSW	Full	III	33	50	17	X			X	X	
38	**Jun 78**	**Roper**	**Full**	**IIb**	**30**	**52**	**18**						
39	**Jun 78**	**Harris**	**Full**	**IIb**	**35**	**49**	**16**						
40	**Sep 78**	**NBC**	**Full**	**IIa**	**34**	**56**	**10**						
41	Oct 78	NBC	Full	III	45	47	8					X	
42	Nov 78	NBC	Full	III	38	49	13					X	

[a] Findings in boldface are fully valid according to the criteria described in the text.

[b] The following abbreviations have been used: ORC = Opinion Research Corporation, RSA = Roger Seasonwein Associates, YSW = Yankelovich, Skelly, and White.

[c] All samples are from the population of adult Americans except for Yankelovich items 7 and 37 (registered voters) and NBC item 42 (voters).

[d] Type I items focus exclusively on the issue of transferring the Canal to Panama. Type Ia items offer two defined alternatives; Type Ib items offer only one. Type II items mention a treaty on the Canal but do not mention any residual rights granted to the United States. Type IIa items mention both a treaty and transfer of the Canal; Type IIb items mention only a treaty. Type III items refer explicitly to residual United States rights to defend, transit, or operate the Canal.

treaties. But from January to April 1978, during the period of Senate consideration, almost half (8 of 17) of the questions revealed support. After April, nearly all (6 of 7) again showed opposition. This might suggest the occurrence of two "turnabouts" in public opinion: from opposition to support back to opposition.

The first step in understanding public opinion on the treaties is to determine whether these "turnabouts" did in fact occur. The best (some would say the only valid) evidence for this comes from responses of comparable samples to series of identical or nearly identical questions. Such series were rather uncommon. And as Roshco (1978), Robinson and Meadow (1982), and Moffett (1985) have all concluded, they provide no clear evidence of any reversal of opinion. In fact, only Gallup (items 17 and 24) found an actual "turnabout." He traced a shift in net opinion (approval minus disapproval) of 11 percentage points (from −8 to +3) across his aware subsamples between September 30, 1977, and January 9, 1978. Additional evidence of a pro-treaty trend at about this time comes from the Seasonwein series (items 21 and 27), which found a similar 11-point shift between October (−31) and January (−20), and the last two items of the ORC series (items 1a, 2, 8, and 30), which showed a 17-point pro-treaty shift from −70 in May 1977 to −53 in February 1978. But it must be stressed that the final Seasonwein and ORC questions both elicited majority *opposition* to the treaties (55% and 72%, respectively). Further, the change across the full ORC series was only one point, from −54 in June 1975 to −53 in February 1978. Finally and most important, three other series fielded at about the same time as Gallup's (CBS items 20a and 25, NBC items 19 and 26a, and Caddell items 23b and 28) found *decreases* in net support of 2, 3, and 9 points, respectively.[4]

The only other evidence of "turnabouts" comes from the responses to questions which differed substantially. As shown in Table 1 and Table 3 below, four pollsters recorded no fewer than twelve reversals across various pairs of sequential items. But interpretation of these findings is problematic. Given differences in questions, a change in results can be attributed to changes in the questions, the opinions of respondents, or both. While we cannot be certain after the fact which of these alternatives is correct, some insight can be gained by grouping the questions on the basis of obvious similarities of content. If this reveals a clear and consistent pattern of results, the claim that ob-

4. Two other series (CBS items 3 and 5 and Roper items 4, 6, 12, and 16) ended too soon to inform the question of the Gallup "turnabout." Regardless, both show decreases in net support. No series extended long enough to inform the question of the second possible "turnabout." The only remaining series (NBC items 41 and 42) is uninterpretable because the items were asked of samples drawn from different populations.

served changes were the product of question wording gains plausibility.

In the case of the Panama Canal treaties, this kind of analysis proves to be quite simple. The 51 items divide readily into three general categories. Type I questions focus exclusively on the issue of transferring the Canal to Panama. They make no reference to a treaty or to any rights the United States might retain after such a transfer is effected. Within this category, questions can be subdivided into those that offer the respondent a choice between two defined alternatives (Type Ia) and those that seek his response to a single option (Type Ib). The Type I questions are:

> Type Ia: Do you favor the United States continuing its ownership and control of the Panama Canal or do you favor turning ownership and control of the Panama Canal over to the Republic of Panama? [ORC items 1a, 2, 8, and 30.]
>
> Type Ib: Do you agree or disagree with the statement that our government should eventually return control of the Panama Canal to the Government of Panama? [CBS items 3 and 5.]

Type II questions make explicit reference to an actual or hypothetical treaty on the Panama Canal but do not mention any rights granted to the United Staes by that treaty. Within this category, questions can be subdivided into those that mention both a treaty and transfer of the Canal (Type IIa) and those that omit reference to the transfer and mention only a treaty (Type IIb). Examples of these questions are:

> Type IIa: Turning to another topic, last week President Carter signed a treaty that means the United States would relinquish control of the Panama Canal by the year 2000. Now the Senate must decide whether or not to ratify the treaty. Do you think the Senate should approve the treaty concerning the Panama Canal? [AP item 15.]
>
> Type IIb: Do you think the time has come for us to modify our Panama Canal treaty, or that we should insist on keeping the treaty as originally signed? [Roper items 4, 6, 12, 16, and 22a in part.]

Type III questions refer explicitly to residual U.S. rights to defend, transit, or operate the Canal. Most also mention both a treaty and transfer of the Canal. Examples of these questions are:

> Type III: In September, the Presidents of the United States and Panama signed two treaties which would gradually turn the Panama Canal over to the Panamanians but would provide for the

> continued use and defense of the Canal by the United States. Before these treaties can take effect, the United States Senate must act on them. Do you think the Senate should vote for the new treaties or against them? [Roper item 22b.]
>
> Type III: Would you favor or oppose approval of the Panama Canal treaty if an amendment were added specifically giving the United States the right to intervene if the Canal is threatened by attack? [NBC items 26b and 31 in part.]

The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 2. It shows that responses within each of the four subcategories (Ia, Ib, IIa, and IIb) are remarkably homogeneous. Regardless of differences in time (up to 39 months), sample (full or aware), pollster, question wording, and response options, variation in any particular response category (Pro/Con/Other) never exceeds 16 percentage points. Further, inspection of Table 2 reveals no evidence of any major trend over time within these four groups. Responses to Type III questions, in contrast, are enormously diverse, ranging from 65%–25% support to 53%–29% opposition. Moreover, these findings follow a rough temporal sequence, from opposition to support to opposition. This outcome is examined more fully below.

Turning to between-group comparisons, the difference in findings for subcategories Ia and Ib suggests that the number of defined alternatives provided to respondents did have a substantial impact. Specifically, the sole Type Ia question (ORC items 1a, 2, 8, and 30, quoted above) offered a clear choice between keeping the Canal and turning it over to Panama. It consistently showed overwhelming opposition to the transfer. The sole Type Ib question (CBS items 3 and 5, quoted above) asked only if the United States should "return control" of the Canal to Panama. Like nearly all other questions on the topic, it described no positive alternative.[5] And it consistently found both higher levels of support for the transfer and higher levels of uncertainty than the ORC question.

A more important conclusion, based on a comparison of categories I and II, is that reference to a "treaty" on the Canal had a strong positive influence on responses. The best evidence of this comes from ORC questions 1a (Type Ia) and 1b (Type IIa), asked sequentially in the same poll. Item 1a, quoted above, found 66%–12% opposition. Item 1b asked:

5. The only major exceptions are the five Roper questions (4, 6, 12, 16, and 22a) that offered a choice between modifying the existing treaty and keeping it as originally signed. It will be shown, however, that these questions incorporate a crucial ambiguity that makes it difficult to interpret their results.

> As you may know, when a treaty is negotiated with a foreign country, the treaty has to be voted on by the U.S. Senate. If a treaty is negotiated turning over ownership and control of the Panama Canal to the Republic of Panama, do you think the U.S. Senate should approve or disapprove such a treaty?

This item found 48%–29% opposition, a positive net shift of 35 points. Additional evidence comes from those instances in which Type I and II questions were asked within a month of each other (items 3 and 4, 5 and 4, 8 and 9, 30 and 29a). All of these pairs show positive shifts of 8 to 44 points.

These findings demonstrate that a significant fraction of the American public, perhaps 15%, may be willing to support ratification of a negotiated treaty even though they oppose its provisions. The explanation for this phenomenon is unclear, but it could reflect strong popular commitments to procedural legality and "keeping our word." Regardless, it implies the need for great care in interpreting poll results on *all* treaty negotiations, including such hardy perennials as strategic arms limitation. In the case at hand, it suggests that the idea of ceding the Canal to Panama may have been even *less* popular than most commentators have concluded. With one exception, all of the questions asked during the period of discussion and ratification of the Carter treaties (items 10 through 34b) made reference to a treaty. The exception, ORC item 30, found 72%–19% opposition.

Table 2 also illuminates a widespread and serious misinterpretation. It is almost an article of faith among treaty supporters that any bald reference to the notion of transferring the Canal somehow biased responses against the treaties. This attitude is evident in Moffett (1985) but is perhaps clearest in an influential article by Harvard professor William Schneider. Published in the *Washington Post* at the start of the ratification process, it was promptly read into the record of the Senate debate by pro-treaty senators. Under the subhead " 'Control' Is the Key Word," Schneider claims (1978:C1):

> A look at all the questions asked over the past year reveals that "control" of the canal has long been the key issue to the American public. Any question which specifies that the United States will hand over control of the canal to Panama elicits strongly negative public reaction—unless the meaning of "control" is further qualified.

There follows (C4) much discussion of Americans' "primordial" attachment to the Canal and of "property rights" as the "most fundamental of American values."

A careful review of all polls reveals that "control" could not have

Table 2. Polls on the Panama Canal Treaties, Grouped by Question Content

Type	Item	Date	Sample	Results (%) Pro	Con	Other
I	**All**			**16**	**67**	**17**
Ia	1a	6/75	Full	12	66	22
Ia	2	4/76	Full	12	75	13
Ia	8	5/77	Full	8	78	14
Ia	30	2/78	Full	19	72	9
Ia	**All**			**13**	**73**	**15**
Ib	3	5/76	Full	24	52	24
Ib	5	6/76	Full	22	57	21
Ib	**All**			**23**	**55**	**23**
IIb	4	6/76	Full	26	46	28
IIb	6	1/77	Full	24	53	23
IIb	12	8/77	Full	28	44	28
IIb	16	9/77	Full	27	53	20
IIb	18	10/77	Full?	30	55	15
IIb	22a	10/77	Split	31	50	19
IIb	29a	2/78	Full	31	40	29
IIb	35	4/78	Full	37	44	19
IIb	38	6/78	Full	30	52	18
IIb	39	6/78	Full	35	49	16
IIb	**All**			**30**	**49**	**22**

II	**All**			**29**	**52**	**19**	**III**	**All**			**45**	**41**	**15**
IIa	1b	6/75	Full	29	48	23	III	7	3/77	Full	29	53	18
IIa	9	5/77	Full?	27	51	22	III	11	8/77	Aware	37	47	16
IIa	10	8/77	Full	27	55	18	III	17	9/77	Aware	40	48	12
IIa	13	9/77	Full?	26	49	25	III	20b/a	10/77	Full	63	24	13
IIa	14	9/77	Full	26	51	23	III	22b	10/77	Split	33	47	20
IIa	15	9/77	Full	29	50	21	III	23b	12/77	Full?	49	30	21
IIa	19	10/77	Aware	30	61	9	III	24	1/78	Aware	45	42	13
IIa	20a	10/77	Full	29	49	22	III	26b	1/78	Aware	65	25	10
IIa	21	10/77	Full	28	59	13	III	28	2/78	Full?	47	37	16
IIa	23a	12/77	Full?	26	53	21	III	29b/c	2/78	Full	38	33	29
IIa	25	1/78	Full	29	51	20	III	31	2/78	Aware	54	40	6
IIa	26a	1/78	Aware	28	62	10	III	32a	3/78	Full	49	41	10
IIa	27	1/78	Full	35	55	10	III	32c/d	3/78	Full	44	39	17
IIa	32b	3/78	Full	29	60	11	III	34b	4/78	Full	51	35	14
IIa	33	3/78	Aware	35	55	10	III	36	5/78	Full	47	42	11
IIa	34a	4/78	Full	30	53	17	III	37	5/78	Full	33	50	17
IIa	40	9/78	Full	34	56	10	III	41	10/78	Full	45	47	8
IIa	**All**			**29**	**54**	**17**	III	42	11/78	Full	38	49	13

NOTE: See Table 1 notes a, c, and d.

been the "key word." Of the 25 questions asked in the year preceding the article (items 7–27), only 9 mentioned "control." Seven of these did elicit negative reactions, but so did 14 of the 16 other items. Nor was it the "key issue," except in the most obvious sense. Recall that Type IIa questions make reference to both a treaty and transfer of the Canal; Type IIb questions mention only a treaty. As shown in Table 2, these groups produced almost identical levels of support and only marginally different opposition. Similarly, the 13 Type III questions that mentioned a treaty, transfer, and residual rights[6] yielded average responses of 45.9% Pro, 40.2% Con, and 13.9% Other; the three Type III items (28, 29b/c, 32a) that mentioned only a treaty and rights (i.e., omitted transfer) produced almost identical average responses of 44.7, 37.0, and 18.3%, respectively. In short, the evidence from Type II and III questions shows that reference to transfer (i.e., "control") of the Canal had no discernible effect on responses.

The key issue seems to have been residual U.S. rights to defend, transit, and operate the Canal, mentioned only in Type III questions. This is apparent in the average responses to Type II and III questions shown in Table 2. But better evidence comes from the six polls (20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 34) in which Type II and III items were asked sequentially of the same sample. All produced strong positive net shifts averaging 45 points. Finally, the only items that found majority or plurality support for the treaties were of Type III.

Of course, not all Type III items elicited support and, as noted, the results in this category are highly diverse. However, it appears that this diversity is largely a product of differences in the description of U.S. defense rights provided by each question.[7] The seven Type III items that found opposition to the treaties simply noted those rights without elaboration (see, e.g., Roper item 22b quoted above). In contrast, those items which found support for the treaties almost always specified either the term or means of enforcement of the rights. Thus some respondents were told that the United States could defend the Canal "always" (item 20b), "forever" (items 23b and 28), "beyond the year 2000" (item 34b), or "even after it is being run by the Panamanians" (item 36). Others were told of U.S. rights to "intervene if the canal is threatened by attack" (items 26b and 31), "send in troops to keep the Canal open" (item 20b), or use "U.S. military force to defend the canal in an emergency" (items 29b and 32c). In general, the stron-

6. In some instances (items 20b, 23b, 26b, 32c/d, and 33b) transfer was mentioned only in a preceding item. Yankelovich items 7 and 36 make no reference to a treaty and so are excluded from this analysis.

7. Only one Type III question (Harris item 32a) omitted reference to United States defense rights. It found plurality support for Senate ratification of a treaty that "made certain that after the year 2000 the canal would be neutral in allowing ships from all countries, including the United States, to go through the canal."

ger the wording of U.S. defense rights, the higher the support for the treaties. More important, the highest levels of support were produced by items 20b/a, 26b, and 31, which suggest the United States would have the right to intervene *unilaterally* to defend the Canal. The sole exception to this analysis, as might be expected, is Gallup item 24. It noted only the right of the United States to "defend the canal against a third nation," but elicited plurality support.

In conclusion, detailed analysis of all available polls shows no evidence of any major trend in opinion on the Panama Canal treaties. At most there may have been a slight increase in support (about 5 points), but only *after* the treaties were ratified in April 1978. The rough temporal pattern shown in Table 1 seems to be an artifact of the widespread tendency of the pollsters to change their question from Type I to II to (strong) III back to II. In particular, there is no firm evidence of any "turnabout" of opinion. This is shown most clearly in Table 3, which lists all instances in which a given pollster charted a reversal of opinion in the same or sequential polls. In 12 of the 13 instances, the "reversal" followed a change in questions, from Type II to III or III to II. The *only* exception is the anomalous Gallup series.

Evaluation of Polling Practices

If one accepts that public opinion on the Panama Canal treaties was static, the problem is then to determine why so many knowledgeable observers formed the erroneous impression that approval had increased. Examination of polling practices reveals three major factors which may have contributed to this misinterpretation. The first is the sheer diversity of questions asked: 40 of the 51 were different. In part, this was an unavoidable consequence of the number of pollsters (ten) who fielded national surveys on the topic. But it was due mostly to the marked tendency of individual pollsters to change questions with great frequency. Given this diversity, it was perhaps inevitable that some partisan or naive observers would see illusory trends in the results.

The second factor is the nature of the questions asked. It has been shown that the pattern of findings corresponds closely to changes in question wording. The problem now is to determine which questions provide appropriate measures of public opinion on the Carter treaties. One solution is to assume that a poll question can be flawed in only three ways: it can be erroneous, ambiguous, or biased. An appropriate question exhibits none of these flaws.

In this analysis, a question is designated *erroneous* if it contains a clear and significant error of fact. As shown in Table 1, ten questions meet this criterion. Six of these (items 3, 5, 7, 10, 14, 37) use the phrases "hand control back," "giving back," or "return control" to

Table 3. Reversals of Opinion in Same or Sequential Polls, by Pollster

					Results (%)			
Poll	Item	Date	Sample	Type	Pro	Con	Other	Net Shift
Caddell	23a	Dec 77	Full?	IIa	26	53	21	
	23b	Dec 77	Full?	III	49	30	21	+46
CBS/NYT	20a	Oct 77	Full	IIa	29	49	22	
	20b/a	Oct 77	Full	III	63	24	13	+59
	20b/a	Oct 77	Full	III	63	24	13	
	25	Jan 78	Full	IIa	29	51	20	−61
	34a	Apr 78	Full	IIa	30	53	17	
	34b	Apr 78	Full	III	51	35	14	+39
Gallup	17	Sep 77	Aware	III	40	48	12	
	24	Jan 78	Aware	III	45	42	13	+11
Harris	29a	Feb 78	Full	IIb	31	40	29	
	29b/c	Feb 78	Full	III	38	33	29	+14
	32a	Mar 78	Full	III	49	41	10	
	32b	Mar 78	Full	IIa	29	60	11	−39
	32b	Mar 78	Full	IIa	29	60	11	
	32c/d	Mar 78	Full	III	44	39	17	+36
	32c/d	Mar 78	Full	III	44	39	17	
	35	Apr 78	Full	IIb	37	44	19	−12
NBC	26a	Jan 78	Aware	IIa	28	62	10	
	26b	Jan 78	Aware	III	65	25	10	+74
	31	Feb 78	Aware	III	54	40	6	
	33	Mar 78	Aware	IIa	35	55	10	−36
	33	Mar 78	Aware	IIa	35	55	10	
	36	May 78	Full	III	47	42	11	+25
	36	May 78	Full	III	47	42	11	
	40	Sep 78	Full	IIa	34	56	10	−27

NOTE: See Table 1 notes c and d.

describe transfer of the Canal to Panama. This implies falsely that at some earlier time Panama had possession or control *of the Canal*. The remaining questions misstate provisions of the treaties (items 11, 13), the existence of changes to them (item 29b), or the treaty to which changes were made (item 32c).[8] All of these errors seem likely to have encouraged pro-treaty responses.

8. See Smith and Hogan (1985:28–34) for a more complete discussion of these and other flaws.

A question is *ambiguous* if there is no necessary connection between its findings and some related topic of interest. In the case at hand, we are concerned with public opinion on the treaties negotiated by the Carter Administration. Twenty-one questions are ambiguous with reference to this topic. Eight (items 1a, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 30, 37) make no mention of a treaty but ask instead about the policy of ceding the Canal to Panama. Three others (items 1b, 9, 10), all fielded before the Carter treaties were announced, ask if respondents would support "a" treaty giving ownership and/or control of the Canal to Panama. These are ambiguous because one could oppose the policy of giving up the Canal but support a negotiated treaty which does so, and one could oppose an imaginary treaty with only one provision but support the actual Carter treaties with their guarantees of U.S. rights. Further, it seems likely that these questions would tend to underestimate apparent support for the Carter treaties. Using them for that purpose is therefore equivalent to asking questions with an anti-treaty bias.

Five Roper questions (items 4, 6, 12, 16, 22a) ask if the original Panama Canal treaty should be modified or preserved unchanged. Five other questions (items 20b, 23b, 26b, 28, 31) ask if respondents would support the Carter treaties *if* they contained strong guarantees of U.S. rights. The Roper items are ambiguous because many staunch opponents of the Carter treaties (e.g., Ronald Reagan) were in favor of modifying the original treaty. The hypothetical questions are ambiguous because they describe the Carter treaties not as they are but as they might be. Thus it seems likely that both groups of questions would tend to overestimate apparent support for the Carter treaties. Using them for that purpose is therefore equivalent to asking questions with a pro-treaty bias.

Finally, a question is defined as *biased* if it asserts as true a position that is the subject of serious contention. Two such positions, discussed in detail by Hogan (1986), are mentioned in the treaty questions. The first concerns ownership of the Canal and Canal Zone. Treaty opponents claimed ownership, literal or metaphorical, by the United States; treaty supporters argued that Panama retained ownership under the original treaty but allowed the United States to exercise the rights of ownership and sovereignty. Regardless of which side is correct, 12 questions (items 1a, 1b, 2, 8, 9, 11, 19, 21, 26a, 27, 30, 31) assert or imply U.S. ownership. Because these support the arguments of the treaty opponents, they are coded as biased against approval of the treaties.

The second position concerns U.S. rights to defend and transit the Canal. President Carter claimed that these were defined adequately in the text of the Neutrality Treaty. However, he and President Torrijos of Panama sought to clarify them in a Statement of Understanding

issued on October 14, 1977. Critics immediately pointed out that the Statement was not binding. Accordingly, the Senate added the Statement to the Neutrality Treaty in the form of the two so-called "leadership" amendments. But this did not resolve the issue. Treaty supporters claimed that the amendments insured U.S. rights after the year 2000. Treaty opponents disagreed. While the first amendment (U.S., 1979:365–6) does give the United States and Panama "the right to act against any aggression or threat directed against the Canal," it also stipulates that "This does not mean, nor shall it be interpreted as a right of intervention of the United States in the internal affairs of Panama" and that "Any United States action . . . shall never be directed against the territorial integrity . . . of Panama." Similarly, while the second leadership amendment does give U.S. and Panamanian ships priority passage in an emergency, it neither defines "emergency" nor specifies who will determine if one exists (U.S., 1979:374). Because the Canal would be an integral part of Panama and completely under its control, opponents argued that U.S. "rights" were illusory, their exercise subject to Panamanian approval. They therefore sought unsuccessfully to add amendments granting *unilateral* U.S. rights of defense and transit. It is irrelevant for present purposes which interpretation of the leadership amendments is correct. Suffice it to note that this issue dominated the Senate ratification debate and will be resolved only if a "threat" or "emergency" arises after 2000. But 11 questions (items 17, 24, 29b, 32a, 32c, 33, 34b, 36, 37, 41, 42) state categorically that the treaties do give the United States these rights and so are coded as biased in favor of the treaties.

Several important conclusions follow from this analysis. The most obvious is that 38 of the 51 questions, including all that show apparent support for the treaties, are flawed. Great care should be exercised in interpreting this finding. Many questions described as "ambiguous" are perfectly legitimate ones to ask. They become problematic only if used to estimate support for the Carter treaties. And many later questions appear to have been biased as a result of a laudable effort to provide a more comprehensive and fair description of the terms of the treaties. Nevertheless, it is clear that only 13 questions (printed in boldface in Table 1) are fully valid. These show the American public consistently opposed the Carter treaties by a margin of about 5 to 3. Table 1 also reveals that earlier questions tend to be flawed in ways that underestimate apparent support for the treaties; later questions tend to be flawed in ways that overestimate apparent support. The result is a pattern of findings that seems likely to have led some observers to erroneously perceive a "turnabout" in opinion. This pattern, it should be noted, was not produced by merely asking different questions, but by asking differentially flawed questions.

The third factor that may have misled observers is the interpretation of results provided by pollsters. The 10 polls that found apparent support for the treaties are of particular interest. Three of these (items 23a–b, 28, 29a–c) were private, and full reports of their results have not been publicly released. A fourth (item 36) was fielded after ratification. Of the remainder, examination of the original news releases reveals serious misinterpretations in four of the six cases. All of the misinterpretations favor the pro-treaty position.

Consider the identical September (item 17) and January (item 24) Gallup polls. Both began with a filter item on awareness and then asked their aware subsamples three questions designed to measure knowledge of "key facts" about the treaties: the year the Canal will be turned over to Panama ("correct" answers: 2000 or 1999), whether the United States will retain defense rights (yes), and how much the "biggest U.S. aircraft carriers and supertankers" use the Canal (not at all). Last, all respondents were asked a Type III approval item. Results from both polls show a 7% increase in awareness (to 81%), persistent ignorance of the "key facts," the famous "turnabout" in approval, and relatively high support (51%–46% and 57%–39%) in the "better informed" subsamples (those who answered all three knowledge questions correctly). The September news release (Gallup, 1977:1) emphasizes the knowledge findings. Under the headlines "Lack of Knowledge Is Widespread" and "Support for Panama Treaties Increases with Knowledge," it reports progressively higher approval in the unaware, aware, and "better-informed" subsamples. The January release leads with the "turnabout" results but stresses (Gallup, 1978:1) the "important finding" that "the more Americans know about the Panama Canal treaties, the more likely they are to favor Senate ratification."

This interpretation delighted treaty supporters such as Senator Paul Sarbanes, who read the text of the January news release into the record of the Senate debate. Indeed, the embattled Carter Administration had claimed from the outset that the public, initially ignorant, would support the treaties once it understood them, and had launched a massive "public education" campaign to secure that understanding. Gallup's repeated findings of widespread ignorance and a link between knowledge and support, even more than the "turnabout," provided direct confirmation of the Carter view from an independent and highly respected source. Unfortunately, the Gallup interpretation is seriously flawed.

One problem is that the questions about "key facts" do not provide an adequate index of knowledge. The first and third questions are factual, but of doubtful significance. The second question is significant, but it cannot be described as factual. It asked ". . . will the United

States have the right to defend the Panama Canal against third-nation attacks . . . ?" and specified "yes" as the correct answer. But in March 1978, for only the second time in U.S. history, the Senate added binding amendments to a negotiated treaty. A major purpose of these "leadership" amendments was to establish that the United States did have the right to defend the Canal. Therefore many senators must have thought that this right was in doubt. The Gallup interviews were conducted in September and January, well before the amendments were formally proposed. Thus, at those times, it was not a "fact" that the treaties granted that right. It was at best an *opinion,* dominant only among treaty supporters. This suggests a wider problem. The "facts" addressed by the knowledge questions are "key" only to the pro-treaty arguments that the pacts secure United States control until the year 2000 and guarantee defense rights thereafter, and that the Canal is of declining importance because it cannot be used by the largest U.S. ships.[9] Obviously, treaty opponents would nominate a different set of facts as "key." Thus Gallup's "better-informed" subsamples are best described as those who knew and accepted certain pro-treaty facts and opinions. It is neither surprising nor illuminating to find relatively high levels of treaty support in these groups.

A further problem involves several crucial omissions. The September news release (Gallup, 1977) reports the size of the "better-informed" group (1 in 14) and the rate of correct responses for the knowledge questions (26%, 43%, and 14%), all computed for the full sample. The January release (Gallup, 1978) omits the size of the "better-informed" group and reports correct response rates of 20%, 54%, and 24%. This might suggest an increase in knowledge commensurate with the increase in support found by the January poll. But the reality is much different. Inspection of the original data held by the Roper Center[10] shows that the figures in the January release are for the "aware" subsample, with the first and third figures transposed. When computed for the full sample, the January data actually show slight *decreases* in the average percentage of correct response per question (from 27.7% to 26.9%) and the size of the "better-informed" groups (from 6.6% to 5.5%). Thus we are faced with the curious finding of an increase in treaty support (the "turnabout") associated with a decrease in knowledge. This contradicts the central thrust of the Gallup interpretation.

Consider next the October CBS (items 20a–b) and January NBC

9. Harris (1977:3) found 53%–26% opposition to the "pro-treaty statement" that "The Panama Canal is not as important as it was, since big supertankers and aircraft carriers can't go through it, so it is a mistake to make such a fight over our keeping control of it."
10. In response to our query, the Gallup organization acquired these data from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research and generously made them available to us.

(items 26a–b) polls. Both began with a Type IIa item and found strong opposition. CBS then asked if respondents would support the treaties if they felt the United States could "always send in troops to keep the canal open"; NBC asked if respondents would support treaties amended to give the United States the right to "intervene if the canal is threatened by attack." These produced the highest levels of support ever recorded.

There is nothing inherently wrong with these items. But the CBS News release (1977:3) links its question to the Carter–Torrijos Statement of Understanding and concludes that a "high proportion" of treaty opponents "could be turned into supporters" if convinced of the Statement's guarantees. The NBC News release (1978:1) specifically equates its question with the leadership amendments and concludes that "there seems to be widespread support" for the amended treaties. These interpretations are, at best, highly dubious. As noted above, the Statement and leadership amendments specifically *prohibit* "intervention of the United States in the internal affairs of Panama" and action against Panama's "territorial integrity." It is very difficult to reconcile the wording of the poll questions with these restrictions. The questions seem to describe the right of unilateral U.S. intervention sought (unsuccessfully) by treaty opponents, not, as asserted in the news releases, the right of mutual defense guaranteed by the Statement and leadership amendments. Because of this error, both releases appear to seriously exaggerate potential support for the treaties as modified by the leadership amendments.[11]

Consider last the March Harris poll (items 32a–d). Its first two questions found 49%–41% approval of the Senate's ratification of the first treaty (described as ensuring the neutrality of the Canal) but 60%–29% opposition to the second treaty (described as giving control of the Canal to Panama). It then informed respondents that the *second* treaty had been changed to give the United States defense and transit rights and found 72%–19% approval of the changes. Finally, respondents were asked if they favored the second treaty as changed. This item elicited 44%–39% support.

One problem with this poll is that the changes it describes (the leadership amendments) were made to the *first* treaty, not the second. But a more serious concern is the interpretation provided by the Harris news release. Under the headline "Second Panama Canal Treaty Has Support," it states (Harris, 1978:1):

> By a relatively narrow 44–39 percent, a plurality of the American people now favors the second Panama Canal treaty, scheduled

11. NBC's release on its February poll (item 31) exhibits similar problems but does not *explicitly* equate its question wording with the leadership amendments.

> to be voted on by the U.S. Senate during the last week of this month.
>
> This treaty gives control of the canal to Panama after the year 2000, with the provisions that in an emergency, U.S. military force will be allowed to defend the canal and U.S. warships will have priority in going through the canal. Without these provisions, Americans reject giving control of the canal to Panama by 60–29 percent.

This is simply wrong. The best estimate from this poll is that the American people opposed the second treaty by 60%–29%. The Harris interpretation would be reasonable only if the entire population had been informed by Harris interviewers of the supposed changes to the second treaty.

Evaluation of Reporting Practices

It seems likely that the diversity of poll questions, their pattern of flaws, misinterpretation of several key findings, and the anomalous Gallup series all contributed to the widespread misunderstanding of public opinion on the Panama Canal treaties. Another factor may have been the coverage of these polls in the national news media (i.e., those capable of reaching a substantial fraction of the American public or policy-making elite). Accordingly, this section evaluates all reports from the period 1975–1978 of relevant poll results in the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and early evening commercial television news.[12]

The amount, style, and quality of coverage vary widely across the six media. Nine stories in the *New York Times*, all published between August 1977 and April 1978, include specific (i.e., quantified and attributed) results. These were drawn from six polls: May ORC (item 8); August Gallup (item 11); September AP (item 15); and October (items 20a–b), January (item 25), and April (items 34a–b) CBS/*New York Times*. With one spectacular exception, the coverage is generally detailed, factual, and accurate. Interpretation of the reversals of opinion generated by the October and April CBS questions is especially perceptive and restrained (see, e.g., *New York Times*, 1978:A1/10). The exception is a story by Terence Smith published just before the ratification debate, in which he reports (1978:4):

12. *New York Times* poll reports were identified through the *New York Times Index*. *Time* and *Newsweek* poll reports were identified by an exhaustive review of all of their Panama coverage. Television poll reports were identified through an exhaustive review of *Television News Index and Abstracts* abstracts of all Panama stories and studied through the use of videotapes provided by the Vanderbilt Television News Archive.

> Last May, according to public opinion surveys conducted for the White House by pollster Patrick Caddell, an overwhelming 87 percent opposed the treaties. Today, that figure has been reduced to 55 percent, according to White House sources.

As Roshco (1978:356–7) and Moffett (1985:117–8) have argued, the 87% figure is apparently a transposition of the May ORC (item 8) finding; the 55% figure may be from the October Caddell survey (item 18). Smith also cites a November 1 memorandum to the President in which Hamilton Jordan claims a 30–35 point rise in support.

Characterizations of public opinion abound in *Newsweek*'s coverage of the treaties, but only six stories, all published between September 1977 and March 1978, mention polls. And the only specific findings reported are for the August (item 11) and January (item 24) Gallup surveys. The 1977 stories all stress popular skepticism. The point is made most forcefully in an October article (*Newsweek*, 1977:48) on "serious opposition at the grass-roots level" which notes: "Polls indicate that something like 60 per cent of the U.S. citzenry is either flatly opposed or doubtful." But a January 2 lead quotes "Jerry Ford" to the effect that "public opinion is already shifting in favor" of the treaties (Alpern with Lindsay, 1978:19). Six weeks later there is speculation about a "remarkable turnabout," buttressed by the January Gallup finding that for the "first time" [*sic*] a plurality of Americans support the "amended" [*sic*] treaties (Steele et al., 1978:18). Finally, a March 1978 *Newsweek* article reviews the 10-month ratification effort, which had begun with "opinion polls [*sic*] showing only 16 [*sic*] per cent of the public behind it" and succeeded at least in part because of "a colossal public relations and persuasion campaign that swung public opinion to roughly an equal division on the treaties" (Boeth et al., 1978:42).

Eight stories published in *Time* between August 1977 and July 1978 mention polls, including specific results from four national surveys. Embedded in a context of openly pro-treaty reporting, this coverage tends to be both inaccurate and eisegetical. For example, an August article (*Time*, 1977a:28) notes the 78% to 14% [*sic*] opposition found by an ORC poll of "1100 [*sic*] Americans [*sic*]," but quickly adds: "Of course, these figures could change drastically now that a treaty is in sight." This prediction is confirmed three weeks later in a report of the August Gallup poll (item 11) which concludes (1977b:21) that "the figures represent an increase in support over earlier surveys." By February, the reader is informed in passing (1978a:19) that "polls show a majority of the public in favor." The pattern is completed in a March article which compares findings from the August (item 11) and January (item 24) Gallup surveys to show (1978b:9) "a turnabout for which the

Administration can claim substantial credit." But *Time*, alone among the media studied, followed public opinion after ratification. Thus its final word comes in a June story on the 1978 Yankelovich poll (item 37) which reports without comment (*Time*, 1978c:28) that respondents, by a 50%–33% margin, consider the treaties "a mistake."

Television coverage is similarly diverse. ABC does not appear to have reported any poll results in its early evening newscasts, relying instead on projected Senate vote tallies. On CBS, five stories mention specific findings. These include a reference (11 August 1977) by Senator Jesse Helms to the May ORC (item 8) results, a report (21 September) of the September AP (item 15) findings, a major story (1 November) on the October CBS (items 20a–b) poll, and two pieces (13 April 1978) on the April CBS (items 34a–b) survey. The reporting is generally factual and accurate, as with the *New York Times*, but less extensive. In particular, the results of the two CBS reversal questions (items 20b and 34b) are not mentioned explicitly, and no attempt is made to assess the trend of public opinion.

In contrast, NBC charts a clear reversal in public opinion. Early opposition to the treaties is established by brief descriptions (10 and 22 August and 21 September 1977) of the August NBC (item 10), May ORC (item 8), and September AP (item 15) findings. But an 11 January 1978 news analysis, while noting "public opinion polls have consistently shown a majority of the American people opposed" to the treaties, concludes with the assertion that "public opinion seems to be changing . . . so opponents of the treaty are worried." Two days later, a major story on Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd's decision to suport the treaties if modified to clarify U.S. rights includes this discussion of NBC's January (items 26a–b) survey:[13]

> Senator Byrd's feeling that the Panama Canal treaties need some revision matches the feeling of the American public. . . .
>
> An NBC/Associated Press poll shows most Americans still against the Panama Canal treaties as they now stand. [Video: 'Yes 28%' over 'No 62%'] Only 28% say yes; 62% say no. But if the treaties were amended to give the United States the right to intervene against an outside threat, [video: 'Yes 65%' over 'No 28%'] 65% would say yes to ratification, 28% would say no. [Video: 'YES' in large letters] 'Yes' was the answer by most of the 1600 adults questioned this week by telephone, 'yes' with the intervention amendment as a condition to giving Panama the Canal in the year 2000.
>
> But if the treaties are actually amended as Senator Baker and others have demanded. . . .

13. See Smith and Hogan (1985:54–55) for a complete text of this story.

Aside from its emphasis, this story is interesting because it explicitly links public support for the right to intervene to Senators Byrd and Baker, soon to introduce the leadership amendments which specifically abjure that right. The NBC News attitude toward conservative amendments designed to secure a unilateral right of intervention is shown by its report of the February NBC (item 31) poll, delivered by David Brinkley on 28 February 1978:

> In the Senate today, opponents of the Panama Canal treaties lost another vote. Their strategy is to load down the treaties with so many amendments that nobody will vote for them. In another attempt at this today they lost, 69 to 24. A new NBC News/ Associated Press poll shows public support for these treaties has declined a little in recent weeks, but a majority of 54% of the public still supports them.

Gone is any reference to the hypothetical right to "intervene" specified by the poll question, and an apparent net shift of 23 points (quite possibly the result of major changes in question wording) is dismissed as "little."

In general, CBS and the *New York Times* provided accurate and perceptive accounts of public opinion on the treaties. But the *Time*, *Newsweek*, and NBC stories, and the Smith article in the *Times*, display serious flaws. During the crucial period of Senate deliberation (January through April 1978) all claimed a massive shift in approval based on comparison of responses to different questions asked, in most cases, by different pollsters. Furthermore, the coverage is littered by errors of fact and inference and shows little understanding of the complex issues involved. In particular, any description of U.S. rights provided by a poll question, however extreme, is equated with the carefully qualified leadership amendments, and responses to such questions are invariably interpreted as showing the level of support for the amended treaties.

Equally disturbing are certain common omissions. After January 1978, most findings of continued public opposition were simply ignored. This is especially puzzling in the case of the February 1978 ORC poll (item 30). Although ambiguous if used to gauge support for the actual treaties, its findings of 72%–19% opposition to the concept of ceding the Canal might have served as a caution to facile claims of a "turnabout." But none of the six media ever mentioned it, although four had reported ORC's May 1977 results (item 8). Also omitted were the methodological details that would have allowed an educated reader or viewer to discover the misinterpretations embedded in the media coverage. Only two articles, both in the *New York Times*, provided the complete text of a question; only one, also in the *Times*, included all of

the information required by the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Standards of Disclosure for poll reports. In *Time* and *Newsweek* almost no information was given.

Conclusions

The 1977–1978 debate on the Panama Canal treaties should serve as a cautionary tale on the perils of opinion polling. At least four lessons can be learned from it. First, polling on Panama provides another in a long line of demonstrations (see, e.g., Rugg, 1941) of the great sensitivity of public opinion to even minor variations in question wording. Given the large number of pollsters and the tendency of the partisan and the naive to see illusory "trends" in responses to different questions, this problem can never be solved completely. But it could be minimized if pollsters were to make a greater effort to use series of *identical* questions to track opinion over time.

Second, it appears that many later questions were inadvertently biased by the attempt of pollsters to inform respondents about key provisions of the treaties. Such an attempt is reasonable only if one assumes public ignorance about those provisions. Although a constant refrain of many treaty supporters, the only proof of public ignorance comes from Gallup's flawed "knowledge" questions. Contrary evidence includes the extensive educational efforts of both treaty supporters and opponents and the poll findings. These reveal high issue awareness (81% in two polls), salience, and intensity, as well as greater political knowledgeability among the more than one-fifth of the public who were intensely opposed to the treaties (CBS News, 1977:3). But whatever the level of knowledge in this instance, the more important point is that *any* attempt to inform respondents on a topic is problematic. In addition to questions of bias raised by the provision of a selected body of information, it is impossible to be certain that the newly informed respondents are still representative of their population. If the primary task of polling is to discover what the public's views *are*, not what they *might become* given certain information, it is hard to justify this practice.

Third, the extended debate on the Panama Canal treaties centered in the end on subtle differences of interpretation of the nuances of meaning and implication of documents designed to bridge the competing interests of conflicting parties. But these complexities were not adequately addressed by polls on the topic. For example, the key issue was not whether the public would support treaties with strong defense guarantees but whether the leadership amendments provided them. Many asked the former question, none asked the latter. In short, com-

plex and important issues of public policy can be illuminated only by polls which are commensurately subtle, specific, and extensive.

Finally, this study provides another example (cf. Smith and Verrall, 1985; Smith, 1986) of serious deficiencies in news reports of opinion polls. It is quite likely that these contributed to the confusion about public opinion on the treaties. Aside from elementary errors of interpretation, the most disturbing feature of this coverage is the universal practice of omitting the methodological details required by the reporting standards of AAPOR and other professional polling groups. It may be that these standards should be modified to meet the constraints of the broadcast media (Smith, 1984). Regardless, journalists must be brought to realize that unless a poll report includes the complete text of the question and precise information on interviewing dates and populations surveyed, it is *necessarily* unintelligible, inaccurate, or both (Smith, 1984:18–20).

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THE HOLLOW REALIGNMENT
PARTISAN CHANGE IN A CANDIDATE-CENTERED ERA

MARTIN P. WATTENBERG

Abstract In 1984 identification with the Republican party increased to the point where the plurality of Democrats over Republicans reached its lowest point since such measurements began in 1952. Yet the realignment is a hollow one between two parties who still have a weak image in the public mind and an uncertain role in the future of American government. While the balance of power between the two parties shifted, the importance of political parties to the electorate remained at an historically weak level. Split-ticket voting continued to be high and roughly a third of the electorate had nothing to say—either positive or negative—about both the parties. In short, realignment occurred in 1984 without party revitalization and the reestablishment of the linkage between parties and candidates.

As the 1984 election approached, there were ample signs that the long-awaited party revitalization and realignment might at last be under way. To some extent these expectations were realized; Republican identification grew in 1984 to the point where the plurality of Democrats over Republicans reached its lowest level since 1952, when such measurements began. Yet such a realignment is hollow when the two parties involved continue to have a weak image in the public mind and an uncertain role in the future of American government.

For over three decades prior to 1984 the American public had been drifting away from the two major parties. Once the central guiding forces in American electoral behavior, the parties had by 1980 come to be perceived with almost complete indifference by a large percentage of the population. The decline of public affection for the parties was not due to any greater negative feelings about the Democrats and Re-

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publicans but rather to an increasing sense that the parties just no longer matter much in the governmental process.

For example, over a third of those interviewed in the 1980 National Election Study exhibited the following response pattern to a series of four open-ended questions about the political parties:

Q: What do you like about the Democratic party? A: Nothing.
Q: What do you dislike about the Democratic party? A: Nothing.
Q: What do you like about the Republican party? A: Nothing.
Q: What do you dislike about the Republican party? A: Nothing.

When these questions were first asked in 1952, only 10% of the sample responded this way. In the 1950s such indifference usually proved to be part of a more general sense of political apathy and lack of political knowledge; by 1980 it was much more likely to be a specific indicator of apathy and lack of knowledge about the parties themselves.

It probably would have been better for the parties if the public had become more negative rather than more neutral toward them. Negative attitudes can easily be turned into positive attitudes by better performance or a change in policies. To make people care about political parties once again is a much more difficult task in the current candidate-centered mass media age. As this paper will argue, even an election with many signs of realignment was not sufficient to reverse the decline in salience of partisan attitudes in the electorate.

The Evidence for Realignment: Changing the Balance in Party Identification

Since the National Election Studies began in 1952, Democrats have consistently outnumbered Republicans by a ratio of approximately 1.7 to 1.0. As Table 1 shows, this ratio reached an all-time low in 1984, with Democrats outnumbering Republicans by less than 10% for the first time. If one includes the Independent leaners with the respective partisan groups, then the gap is cut even further, with 47.8% identifying with the Democrats, compared to 39.5% for the Republicans. Because Republicans turn out at higher rates than Democrats, this gap is still less among voting participants in 1984, with Democrats having only a 47.4 to 44.6 edge over the Republicans. For the Republican party this is the highest percentage while for the Democratic party it is the lowest ever. Furthermore, despite the increased size of the Republican identifiers, their cohesiveness as a voting bloc was also close to an all-time high in 1984. Only 5% of all Republicans defected in 1984—

Table 1. Party Identification: 1952–1984

	1952	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984
Democrats	47.2	43.6	45.3	51.7	45.4	40.4	39.7	40.8	37.0
Independents	22.6	23.4	22.8	22.8	29.1	34.7	36.1	34.5	34.2
Republicans	27.2	29.1	29.4	24.5	24.2	23.4	23.2	22.4	27.1
Apoliticals	3.1	3.8	2.5	0.9	1.4	1.4	0.9	2.2	1.7
Dem. plurality	20.0	14.5	15.9	27.2	21.2	17.0	16.5	18.4	9.9
Democrats plus Dem. leaners	56.8	49.9	51.6	61.0	55.2	51.5	51.5	52.3	47.8
Pure Indep.	5.8	8.8	9.8	7.8	10.5	13.1	14.6	12.9	11.0
Republicans plus Repub. leaners	34.3	37.4	36.1	30.2	32.9	33.9	32.9	32.6	39.5
Apoliticals	3.1	3.8	2.5	0.9	1.4	1.4	0.9	2.2	1.7
Dem. plurality	22.5	12.5	15.5	31.1	22.3	17.6	18.6	19.7	8.3

well below their average presidential defection rate of 12% for 1952–1980, and the lowest since the 4% rate in the 1956 election.

Assuming the Republicans can hold on to these gains, their presidential strategy should change significantly, turning away from the necessity of winning Democratic and Independent votes and more toward simply maintaining their own base. One possible implication of this is that with the partisan balance now being more equal the two competing parties may offer more distinct appeals to the populace on the presidential level. Since Reagan took over the Republican party leadership, the percentage of the electorate seeing important differences between what the two major parties stand for has grown from the stable 46% to 52% range it occupied during the 1952–1976 period to 58% in 1980 and 63% in 1984. This greater public perception of philosophical differences between the parties may well be one of the most long-lasting changes in the political system from the Reagan era.

Realignment in Electoral Coalitions: Changes in the Demographic Base of Party Support

Another aspect to examine in the search for evidence of realignment is changes in the social base of partisan support. It is generally acknowledged that the party coalitions have been gradually changing and that the New Deal coalition has slowly been withering away (see Petrocik, 1981). In 1984 speculations on the death of the New Deal coalition were widespread in the press. As William Schneider (1984) wrote shortly after the election:

> There have been marked changes in the nature of the Democratic vote. Compare, for example, the vote for Adlai E. Stevenson in 1956 with the vote for Mondale this year. Both Democratic candidates were Midwestern liberals, and both got about the same share of the popular vote (42% for Stevenson, 41% for Mondale). But the nature of their support was very different. Mondale did significantly better than Stevenson among black voters, college graduates, women and professionals. On the other hand, Stevenson's support was much stronger among whites, Southerners, blue-collar workers, union members and Catholics.

Table 2 employs Schneider's instructive idea of comparing the 1956 and 1984 voting patterns, and Table 3 takes it one step further by presenting 1956 and 1984 data on party identification for the various groups in question. From the latter one can see some definite elements of change in the party coalitions, but not to the degree the death notices of the New Deal coalition might lead us to expect.

Table 2. Electoral Coalitions: 1956 and 1984 Compared[a]

	1956	1984		1956	1984
REGION (computed from returns)			INCOME PERCENTILE		
Northeast	60.7	55.1	0–10	59	32
Midwest	58.7	58.4	11–30	56	43
South	51.5	62.0	31–60	58	57
Mountain	60.4	66.9	61–90	57	64
Pacific	55.3	57.7	91–100	75	75
RELIGION			RACE		
White Protestant	66	72	White	61	63
Catholic	54	54	Black	36	9
Jewish	22	31			
			SEX		
AGE			Male	56	63
Under 30	58	57	Female	63	55
30–59	59	59			
Over 60	60	57	UNION		
			Union	48	43
			Nonunion	64	63

[a] Figures are percentages of Republican vote.

For example, across religious groups there is relatively little indication of change. There is some increase in Republican voting among white Protestants, but this has been counteracted by the greater Democratic vote of black Protestants, 90% of whom have voted for the Democrats ever since 1964. Contrary to what Schneider writes, Catholics continued to support the Democrats at above the national average, with Mondale's vote among Catholics exactly matching Stevenson's in 1956. On party identification one finds that both white Protestants and Catholics have moved toward more Republican identification but that the partisan gap between the two religious groups remains just as it was in 1956. And as for Jews, they continued in 1984 to be the only major white ethnic group to vote more Democratic than Republican. Although the 31% Republican vote among Jews is substantially higher than the comparable 22% figure in 1956, it should be noted that 1956 was a historical low point as a result of negative Jewish reaction to Eisenhower's handling of the Suez crisis, and that party identification among Jews still remains overwhelmingly Democratic. Furthermore, Jews were also the only demographic group to support Reagan by less in 1984 than in 1980, having given him 36% of their votes in 1980.

Table 3. Party Coalitions: 1956 and 1984 Compared[a]

	1956	1984		1956	1984
			INCOME		
REGION			PERCENTILE		
Northeast	−9	+9	0–10	+18	+36
Midwest	−1	+1	11–30	+22	+29
South	+45	+14	31–60	+17	+6
Mountain	+31	−7	61–90	+13	0
Pacific	+21	+7	91–100	−22	−33
RELIGION			RACE		
White Protestant	+1	−14	White	+10	0
Catholic	+33	+23	Black	+34	+72
Jewish	+55	+42			
AGE			SEX		
Under 30	+19	+4	Male	+20	0
30–59	+15	+8	Female	+7	+13
Over 60	0	+9			
			UNION		
			Union	+30	+27
			Nonunion	+7	+2

NOTE: The 1984 figures combine the traditional pre–post dataset with the continuous monitoring study for 1984 in order to increase the sample size of the various groups. Because of differences in coding procedures this was not possible for income, however.

[a] Figures are percentage of Democrats minus percentage of Republicans (including Independent leaners).

Another change in the New Deal coalition that Schneider would lead us to expect concerns the union vote. Table 2, however, shows that union members were actually more supportive of Mondale than of Stevenson. The AFL-CIO's early endorsement of Mondale during the presidential primaries and Mondale's long history of support for organized labor apparently blunted any change in the union vote in 1984. In addition, Table 3 shows that the cleavage between union and nonunion voters on party identification remains intact; the Democratic party has suffered losses from the decline in union membership—not from any movement by union members toward Republican identification.

Perhaps most importantly lacking in the demographic evidence for realignment is any indication of unusual support for the Republicans among young voters. Much of the evidence concerning past realignments argues that little change results from people switching parties, but rather that realignment occurs as a result of an influx of new voters

who dramatically shift the partisan balance of power. Commercial polls throughout most of the campaign showed Reagan ahead by a wide margin among voters under thirty, leading many in the press to speculate that realignment had arrived. By election day this edge for the Republicans apparently evaporated. As Table 2 shows, each category voted virtually the same in 1984—just as it was in 1956.

In contrast, there has been a change in the pattern of party identification by age. In the 1950s those over sixty were clearly the most Republican age group in terms of party identification. As a result, the process of generational replacement favored the Democrats for years as a simple consequence of the fact that the people who were leaving the electorate were primarily those socialized during the pre–New Deal period. This Democratic advantage has now apparently run its course.

All of this is not to say that there has been no shift in the party coalitions, but rather that the degree of change has often been overestimated. As for major changes. Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate partisan shifts along the lines of gender, income, and region. The much-heralded gender gap of the 1980s seems somewhat less striking when compared to similar figures for 1956, however. Seen in this perspective the fact that women are voting differently than men is nothing new; what is of interest is that the voting pattern has changed from women being more supportive of Eisenhower to being less supportive of Reagan, and that this is also reflected in the data on party identification.

Turning to the relationship between family income and party identification and the vote, the data point to a resurgence of a cleavage that sharply divided Democrats from Republicans during the New Deal. By 1956 this relationship had dissolved to the point where income made virtually no difference in either the vote or party identification, the only exception being that people in the top 10% in earnings were notably more Republican.[1] In contrast, the .22 correlation between income and the presidential vote in 1984 represents a high point in the election study time series. Should this relationship continue to be strong (and the data on party identification in Table 3 indicates that it probably will), there will be further reason to expect the parties to remain more clearly different than they have been in the past. Having constituencies that differ substantially in terms of income should make for more relatively distinct economic programs.

1. One might think that the Southern democratic vote might obscure the relationship between income and the vote, but controlling for region with the 1956 data makes no difference in this whatsoever.

Finally, the most important transformation in party coalitions has undoubtedly been the change in the regional distribution of the vote. As Schneider points out, the once solid Democratic South is no longer solid at all. Southerners in fact voted at a higher rate for Reagan in 1984 (62%) than the national average. In terms of party identification, the South still remains the most Democratic of all regions, but the decline in the number of Southern Democrats as shown in Table 3 is nevertheless quite steep and significant.

Another important regional change that has largely escaped academic notice to date is the growth of the Republicans in the Mountain West (see Wattenberg and Miller, 1981). Once the most Democratic region of the country second only to the South, over the last several elections the Mountain West has given more of its votes to the Republicans than any other region. Furthermore, party identification figures since 1972 have consistently shown the Republicans to be the majority party of the region. Although the population of the Mountain West casts only about 5% of the presidential vote, its representation in the U.S. Senate is 16%. This advantage for the Republicans plus their increasing ability to win Senate races in the South surely facilitated their takeover of the Senate in 1980 and the subsequent maintenance of the Republican Senate majority.

On the presidential level, the changes in the regional distribution of the vote have resulted in a complete turnaround concerning which party has the most solid base of support in the electoral college. As the result of the Republican gains in the South and Mountain West there are now fifteen states—representing 112 electoral votes—which have voted over 5 percentage points more Republican than the national average in presidential elections since 1964.[2] In comparison, there are only four states—totaling 33 electoral votes—in which the vote has been more than 5% more Democratic than the national average.[3] Of course, this still does not make the Republicans the majority party. What this distribution of votes within the states does give them, though, is a head start in presidential elections.

2. These Republican states and their deviation from the average Republican presidential vote from 1964 to 1984 are: Mississippi (+13.8), Idaho (+12.9), Utah (+12.7), Nebraska (+11.0), Arizona (+9.4), Wyoming (+9.1), Oklahoma (+7.9), Kansas (+7.3), Florida (+6.4), Louisiana (+6.3), North Dakota (+5.9), South Carolina (+5.8), Nevada (+5.7), Virginia (+5.3), and Alabama (+5.1).

3. These Democratic states and their deviation from the average Democratic presidential vote from 1964 to 1984 are: Rhode Island (+11.6), Massachusetts (+11.0), Minnesota (+7.0), and West Virginia (+5.5).

Split-Ticket Voting in 1984

Although the Republicans may now start each presidential election with an advantage in the electoral college, they still are significantly handicapped in House elections because of the Democrats' incumbency advantage. As Schneider (1984) writes, "If the government had passed a decree prohibiting incumbents from running for reelection, the Republican party would probably have gained control of the House in 1984." With the advantage of incumbency, House Democrats were largely able to withstand the Reagan landslide, losing only fourteen seats. In 44% of all the congressional districts the party that won the presidential race lost in the congressional contest. This matches the historical high for this measure set in 1972 when Nixon won a large victory but the Republicans captured only twelve additional House seats.

Such aggregate figures, although instructive as broad indicators of systemic results, can sometimes be misleading as measures of individual level behavior. From Table 4 it can be seen that although partisan behavior did not decline in 1984, it was not substantially revitalized either. Clearly, party identification was a more meaningful predictor of the presidential vote, as the percentage casting party-line votes reached a new high of 80%. As would be expected from the aggregate figures, however, this greater partisan behavior did *not* extend to the congressional level. In the case of both House and Senate elections, party-line voting increased only 1% and thus continued to be well below the comparable figures from the period between 1952 and 1964.

Similarly, in 1984 split-ticket voting remained quite high by historical standards, although down somewhat from the levels of 1980. In the case of ticket splitting between President and House one should not

Table 4. Trends in Party-Line and Split-Ticket Voting: 1952–1984

	1952	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984
Party-line voting									
House	80	82	80	79	74	75	72	69	70
Senate	79	80	79	79	73	69	69	71	72
President	77	76	79	79	69	67	74	68	80
Split-ticket voting									
Pres–House	12	16	14	15	26	30	25	34	25
Senate–House	9	10	9	18	22	23	23	31	20
Local	27	30	27	41	48	56	NA	59	52

make too much of the decrease, given that the 1980 figure is inflated by the Anderson vote. Also, the record high for ticket splitting between Senate and House voting in 1980 now appears to be a blip in the time series due to the abnormal number of strong Senate challengers that year. With these factors properly taken into account, it thus seems that split-ticket voting remains at alarmingly high levels for the future of political parties.

In summary, despite the increase in Republican identification in 1984, it appears from these data that the Reagan victory was just as the aggregate figures imply—a personal one based on his performance in office rather than a widespread party victory on the basis of Republican policy stands.

Policy and Performance Voting in the 1984 Presidential Race

A common theme in the press coverage of the 1984 election was that people liked Reagan but not his policies. Such a pattern of voting behavior seems unlikely given the tendency toward cognitive consistency that generally takes place during any decision-making process. At the very least one would expect voters to conform their perceptions of the candidates' policy stands to their vote choice. In an age of electoral disaggregation, however, where the focus of attention is on the candidates' performance rather than their party's promises, this kind of rationalization may no longer be necessary. Why worry too much about Reagan's policies if one is voting just for Reagan and not for an entire partisan team to accomplish the proposed policies?

Table 5 presents some crucial data on presidential approval and policy proximities for 1984, which is evidence of just such a phenomenon. As best as possible with the available data, I have essentially replicated the model of policy versus performance voting that Arthur Miller and I used to analyze the 1980 election (see Miller and Wattenberg, 1981). For 1980 we argued that although Reagan had the advantage of being close to more people on policy questions than Carter, this proximity was of far less importance than Carter's low performance ratings on matters such as inflation, unemployment, and Iran. Because both the policy and performance marginals seemed to favor Reagan, the argument was largely dependent on the regression equation results displayed in Table 5, showing that performance considerations far outweighed policy ones in the voting calculus.

The 1984 data indicate that although Reagan had the advantage of high approval ratings, on the major policy questions more people felt closer to Mondale's position. By fairly substantial margins those with

Table 5. A Model of the Vote Decision: 1980 and 1984

	1980		1984
Presidential approval[a]			
Overall	39	Overall	58
Inflation	21	Economy	54
Unemployment	26	Budget	33
Iran	32	Foreign policy	48
Afghanistan	48		
Energy	35		
Policy proximities[b]			
Ideology	−3		+1
Govt. spending	+7		−3
Defense spending	+23		−16
Get along with Russia	+17		−2
Govt. guaranteed jobs	+16		+3
Help minorities	+22		−3
Tax cut	+7		—
Central America	—		−23
Govt. help women	—		−2
Regression results[c]			
Presidential approval	.39		.48
Party identification	.36		.32
Ideology	.03		.04
Economic policies	.14		.07
Foreign policies	.05		.03
Minority aid policies	.05		.04
Social issues	.02		.01
Multiple R	.77		.82
(*N*)	(873)		(1058)

[a] Figures are percent approving of the incumbent president's performance.
[b] Entries are percent closer to Reagan minus percent closer to Carter/Mondale.
[c] Regression entries are standardized coefficients predicting the two-party vote.

opinions disagreed with Reagan's willingness to commit military help to Central America and his desire to spend more on defense. And by somewhat smaller margins, people saw Reagan as wanting to cut government services too deeply, not providing enough government aid to minorities and women, and being too tough with the Soviet Union.[4]

Given this pattern of Reagan being favored on performance but not on policies in 1984, it should not be surprising to find that the regression model shows that presidential approval ratings were far more important than voters' policy stands, and that the gap between the two was even greater than in 1980. When the four policy indices are combined into one and the model reestimated, the beta weight for performance is over four times greater than the coefficient for policy stands (.48 compared to .11).

Contrary to most theories of party realignment, it seems clear that the partisan change that occurred in 1984 can be traced not to any shift in policy cleavages but rather to presidential performance. Therefore, it is to be expected that the Republican gains in identification did not benefit the party in voting below the presidential level, as demonstrated above.

This is not to say that even if there had been a mandate for Reagan's policies the realignment would necessarily have been a truly meaningful one, extending beyond the presidency. As I wrote before the 1984 election, realignment depends on the voters translating their likes and dislikes about the candidates and the candidates' stands on specific issues into likes and dislikes about the parties (see Wattenberg, 1984:88–89). The link in the public mind between presidential candidates and their parties has been increasingly weakened, and the data for 1984 fail to show any signs of revitalization in this crucial respect.

Party and Candidate Images in 1984

Since 1952 every presidential election study has asked respondents what they like and dislike about each of the two major parties. By counting the number of likes and subtracting the number of dislikes, one can determine whether a respondent is negative, neutral, or positive toward each party with these data. Table 6 presents this information about each party for 1952 to 1984 as well as for both parties combined. While the Republican image has become notably more positive since 1976, the major finding is that both parties are seen neutrally by nearly half of the population—virtually double the comparable

4. Unfortunately the CPS survey failed to ask a question about what probably was Reagan's best issue in 1984—the proposed tax increase.

Table 6. Attitudes Toward the Parties: 1952–1984

BOTH PARTIES COMBINED	Negative Negative	Negative Neutral	Neutral Neutral	Positive Negative	Positive Neutral	Positive Positive
1952	3.6	9.7	13.0	50.1	18.1	5.5
1956	2.9	9.0	15.9	40.0	23.3	8.9
1960	1.9	7.5	16.8	41.4	24.2	8.3
1964	4.4	11.2	20.2	38.4	20.6	5.0
1968	10.0	13.8	17.3	37.5	17.4	4.1
1972	7.9	12.6	29.9	30.3	14.7	4.7
1976	7.5	11.8	31.3	31.1	13.7	4.5
1980	5.0	8.6	36.5	27.3	17.7	4.8
1984	3.0	7.7	35.8	31.3	18.0	4.1

REPUBLICAN PARTY	Negative	Neutral	Positive
1952	35.0	28.2	36.8
1956	30.5	34.2	35.3
1960	29.6	35.5	34.9
1964	35.4	40.9	23.7
1968	32.6	37.1	30.3
1972	31.8	44.6	23.6
1976	34.8	45.9	19.3
1980	24.8	52.1	23.1
1984	26.1	48.7	25.2

DEMOCRATIC PARTY	Negative	Neutral	Positive
1952	32.3	25.3	42.4
1956	24.2	30.0	45.8
1960	22.2	31.5	46.3
1964	23.0	31.4	45.6
1968	38.6	28.6	32.8
1972	26.9	42.4	30.7
1976	23.3	42.2	34.5
1980	21.1	47.3	31.6
1984	18.8	48.8	32.4

figures for 1952. Combining attitudes toward both parties, the data indicate that the steady growth in the neutral–neutral category was arrested in 1984, but nevertheless partisan neutrality remains at an alarmingly high level for the future of party government.

Thus, despite the signs of realignment, partisan attitudes in the electorate were not revitalized. For both Democrats and Republicans the decline has meant that the public sees them less positively as well as less negatively. Of course both parties should clearly be concerned about inducing the public to view them more favorably, but their first concern should be simply to motivate the public to think more about them. As noted at the outset of this article, over a third of the population had nothing to say about either of the two parties in 1980, and this continued to be true in 1984. By comparison, less than 10% of those interviewed in 1984 had nothing to say to the candidate like–dislike questions.

This growing predominance of candidates over parties can be illustrated by comparing the images of the parties and candidates in 1984 to those of 1956. Examining these open-ended questions by various content dimensions, one finds a variety of images that are becoming more candidate- and less party-centered. One of the most salient images of the parties in the past, for example, has been the perceptions of which socioeconomic and ethnic groups they are for or against. In 1984, however, only 34.0% said something about group benefits in answer to the questions about the parties compared to 43.6% in 1956. By contrast, the figures for the candidate questions on this dimension are 29.4% for 1984 compared to just 16.2% in 1956. Examining the entire 1952–1984 time series reveals that the salience of group benefits in candidate evaluations reached an all-time high in 1984 while for party evaluations the frequency of comments about group benefits fell to a new low.

Another crucial issue affecting the parties' images and stemming from New Deal attitudes is the economic and welfare stands of the Democrats and Republicans. The Democrats were widely supported on such issues in 1956 even though a landslide Republican election occurred that year; by 1984 this was no longer the case. Most important to note is how little *candidate* evaluations centered around such issues in 1956 compared to 1984. Only 4.2% said they liked Eisenhower because of his economic/welfare positions, and only 2.4% expressed dislike of him on this dimension. By 1984 these issues had become primarily candidate-centered, with the comparable figures for Reagan being 27.5% and 23.7%, respectively. As I have noted previously (Wattenberg, 1984:129), the fact that the economic program of the current administration is popularly known as "Reaganomics" rather than "Republican economics" is indicative of how the public views it, i.e., in

candidate-centered, rather than partisan, terms. Indeed, when people were asked whether the national economy had either improved or worsened and why they thought this was the case, 21.1% explicitly said the President was responsible compared to only 0.5% who named one of the parties, 2.8% who mentioned the government in general, and 0.2% who credited or blamed Congress.

On foreign policy issues a similar pattern of change toward candidate-centered images can be found. Given that the President has always had greater power in foreign affairs than in domestic affairs, it should not be surprising that even in 1956 candidates were more frequently associated with foreign policy issues than the parties were. Since then this association with candidates has strengthened even further. From 1956 to 1984 the percentage of respondents mentioning foreign policy in response to one or more of the candidate questions increased from 28.0% to 42.5%, whereas for the party questions the proportion fell from 23.3% to 18.4%. No doubt the most striking difference between the foreign policy images for 1956 as compared to 1984 is that the net partisan result one gets from combining the positive and negative comments is no longer a parallel one between parties and candidates. In 1956 both Eisenhower and the Republican party had a very positive image on foreign policy, while both Stevenson and the Democratic party had a very negative one. By comparison, Reagan's image on this dimension was somewhat negative compared to the slightly positive image the Republicans enjoyed; and Mondale was seen more positively than negatively in this regard, while public judgment of the Democrats was just the opposite.

This disassociation of party from candidate is symptomatic of the major problem facing the political parties today. Perhaps the clearest sort of evidence for this disassociation can be seen in the spontaneous mention of political leaders with respect to the party like–dislike questions. In 1956, 34.4% of those interviewed mentioned a party leader in response to one or more of the questions about the parties; in 1984 this figure was only 14.7%. The most important specific comparison is that of Reagan and Eisenhower as standard-bearers of the Republican party. Despite the fact that Eisenhower was a much less partisan figure than Reagan, 15.3% nevertheless said they liked the Republicans because of him in 1956 compared to only 3.4% with regard to Reagan in 1984.

In summary, party revitalization did not occur in 1984 because the candidate–party link was not reestablished. The situation remains one in which the parties need people to make the connection between them and the candidates before they can regain the level of prominence they formerly held in the public mind.

Conclusion

Given the continuing weakness of the public image of both parties, one must question whether the change in party identification in favor of the Republicans has substantive meaning. One possible explanation for this shift is that partisanship has now become so weak that people are shifting it with their presidential vote. If party identification has become nothing more than an indicator of short-term presidential preference, this would explain why party-line voting increased on the presidential, but not the congressional, level. Although this is a plausible hypothesis, it seems unlikely given that the same circumstances of weak partisanship and a Republican landslide occurred in both 1972 and 1980 without affecting the distribution of party identification at all.

What made the 1984 election different in my view was the clear contrast between the performance of the incumbent Republican administration and the Democratic administration it replaced. For once the choice was not between the present and an uncertain alternative future. Rather, the Reagan–Mondale contest was one between the recent past and a present which had seen major changes. Such a choice was conducive not only to vote switching but to partisan switching as well. Until the Democrats return to office and prove that they can do something different, I believe it is doubtful that these shifts will be substantially reversed.

Should the Republican gains in party identification in 1984 prove to be in fact realigning, this would raise serious questions about how realignments occur. Most previous research looks upon realignment as a decision of the electorate which directly guides the functioning of government. Yet the evidence for a policy mandate in 1984 seems as weak as it has ever been. If anything, there was a reverse policy mandate, with people voting for Reagan in spite of his policies rather than for them. It was performance evaluations that truly mattered in 1984, and it may well be that this rather than policies is the key to realignment.

Yet, even if the Republican surge is a long-lasting one, it will be of limited importance as long as partisan attitudes in the electorate continues to decline. Given the most ideal conditions for party revitalization in decades, all that occurred was a stabilization of the decline. With an incumbent unable to run again, and with what will most likely be fractious campaigns for the presidential nomination within both parties, it seems likely that the conditions in 1988 will be such as to foster further party decline. The candidate-centered age will be with us for a long time to come, regardless of whether the next political era will be a Democratic or Republican one.

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PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD SUICIDE
DEMOGRAPHIC AND IDEOLOGICAL CORRELATES

DARWIN SAWYER AND
JEFFERY SOBAL

Abstract Despite long-standing research interest in the social correlates of suicide, public attitudes toward suicide have received comparatively little attention. Using data from NORC's General Social Survey, this study examines popular support for a person's right to commit suicide when s/he is tired of living or faced with an incurable disease, bankruptcy, or family dishonor. Survey responses to these four items conform to a unidimensional Guttman-type scale. Opposition to suicide, as measured by this scale, varies along a number of sociodemographic lines. Pro-life beliefs and civil libertarianism are strongly related to a person's attitudes toward suicide and explain at least part of every sociodemographic relationship examined. By contrast, life satisfaction, anomia, and social participation measures show no significant associations with suicide attitudes.

Suicide, as a social phenomenon, has gained increased notoriety in recent years with widely publicized accounts of the "suicide crisis" among America's teens and heightened concern over "right-to-die" issues in the United States as well as abroad. The seeming failure to reach consensus on proposed strategies of intervention reflects the highly variegated nature of the suicide problem and the growing ambivalence about what has traditionally been portrayed as a socially

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deviant act. Interest in the normative bases of suicidal behavior dates at least as far back as Durkheim (1951), yet except for a handful of widely scattered and narrowly focused studies (Ansel and McGee, 1971; Domino, Gibson, Polling, and Westlake, 1980; Domino, Cohen, and Gonzalez, 1981; Domino, Moore, Westlake, and Gibson, 1982; Ginsburg, 1971; Hood, 1973; Kalish, 1963; Kalish, Reynolds, and Farberow, 1974; Shneidman, 1971), little evidence has been produced to support this popular conception of public attitudes toward suicide. Even less evidence is available showing whether such attitudes vary within the population, and if so, why.

While opinion polls continue to show substantial public disapproval (Gallup, 1978), survey studies were reporting significant support for the rights of suicide victims as early as 1970 (Beswick, 1970).[1] In a more recent survey (Domino et al., 1980), 12% of the respondents felt that society had no right to interfere with the wishes of suicide victims. Approval levels as high as 48% have been found in cases of terminal illness (NORC, 1983), and while clearly a less compelling justification, fully 20% of the population approves of suicide even when one is simply a burden on his or her family (Gallup, 1978).

Methods

The present article examines the sociodemographic bases and ideological rationale behind these survey findings. Our data are taken from the National Opinion Research Center's (NORC) 1982 national probability sample of the noninstitutionalized U.S. population 18 years and older in March or April of that year (NORC, 1983). The 1982 General Social Survey (GSS) asked respondents four questions regarding a person's "right" to take his/her own life. Of the 1380 respondents answering all four questions (91.6% of the total sample of 1506), 45.9% approved of suicide in the case of "an INCURABLE disease," 14.3% when the person is "tired of living and READY to die," 8.9% when the person has "DISHONORed his/her family," and 8.5% when he/she has "gone BANKRUPT."[2]

We began by Guttman-analyzing survey responses to these four

1. One in 10 people were found to regard suicide as an acceptable solution to life's problems in Beswick's (1970) study.
2. Except for the case of "incurable diseases," approval rates have not changed significantly since the Suicide battery first appeared in the 1977 GSS. The respective percentages approving in 1977 and 1982 were 7% versus 8% for BANKRUPT, 8% versus 9% for DISHONOR, 13% versus 14% for READY, and 38% versus 45% for INCURABLE. The latest GSS approval ratings for 1985 (8% for BANKRUPT and DISHONOR, 13% for READY, and 46% for INCURABLE) show no additional changes of any significance (NORC, 1985).

items to verify that they formed a single underlying dimension.[3] A 5-point (0 to 4) composite index of attitude intensity was subsequently constructed by summing the number of items each respondent opposed (0 for those who uniformly approved and 4 for those who uniformly opposed suicide in all four situations). Next, we intercorrelated this index with 15 sociodemographic characteristics (see Table 1) to determine whether, and if so how, suicide attitudes vary within the population. Finally, we reanalyzed each of these correlations to determine whether the attitude differences we discovered could be "explained" by a respondent's (1) "dissatisfaction with life," which should lead to greater empathy with and thus tolerance for suicide victims; (2) "anomia," which should produce similar reactions among those who experience a lack of purpose in their own lives; (3) "civil libertarianism," which should translate into greater support for the victim's individual autonomy and self-determination; (4) "prolife" values, since suicide, like abortion, can be seen to violate the moral-religious sanctity of human life; and (5) "social participation," which might serve to lessen group pressures to conform to moral-religious prohibitions of this kind. The results of the latter analysis are contained in Table 2.[4]

3. The results of that analysis included a coefficient of reproducibility of .99 and a coefficient of scalability of .93. Both figures are impressive by conventional standards and strongly indicate a cumulative and unidimensional Guttman-type scale (Clogg and Sawyer, 1982; Nie, 1975). Additional evidence of convergent validity was provided by the high intercorrelations (Yule's Q) found among the four items, which ranged from a low of .89 (between INCURABLE and READY) to a high of .99 (between BANKRUPT and DISHONOR, BANKRUPT and READY, and DISHONOR and READY), for an average association of .96. A latent structure analysis offered still further support for the unidimensionality of the four suicide items. For further details, contact the authors.

4. "Life satisfaction" is measured using a 6-point composite index based upon standard NORC indicators of respondent satisfaction with residence, hobbies, family life, friendships, and health (Campbell, 1981; Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers, 1976). "Prolife support" is measured using an 8-point index formed by summing positive responses to NORC questions regarding the propriety of legal abortion in cases of rape, unmarried mothers, defective fetuses, poverty, a desire for no more children, and other reasons (Clogg and Sawyer, 1981; Granberg, 1978). "Civil libertarianism" is measured using a 5-point index formed by summing prolibertarian responses to NORC survey questions regarding the free-speech rights of atheists, racists, communists, militarists, and homosexuals (Erskine and Siegel, 1975; Stinchcombe et al., 1980). "Anomia" is measured on a 3-point summated scale indicating a respondent's agreement that (a) "the lot of the average man is getting worse," (b) "it's hardly fair to bring a child into the world . . . ," and (c) "most public officials are not really interested in the problems of the average man." Finally "social participation" is measured with a 5-point index indicating the frequency with which a respondent interacts (a) with relatives, (b) with neighbors, (c) with friends, and (d) in a bar or tavern. Interested readers may contact the authors for further details regarding the construction of these indexes.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Differences in Suicide Attitudes, 1982

Variable/ (Predic. Power)	Most Opposed	Least Opposed	Percent Difference	Relationship	
				Unadjusted (eta)	Adjusted (beta)
Demographics					
Age (5)	Over 65	30–39	19.0%	.18***	.13***
Race (14)	Nonwhites	Whites	8.8	.08**	.06*
Sex (15)	Women	Men	5.4	.07**	.01
Marital (12)	Widowed	Never marr	20.5	.15***	.09*
Residence					
City size (13)	Rural	Urban	12.8	.14***	.08**
Region (5)	ESC	Pacific	35.0	.18***	.13***
SES					
Work status (5)	Retired	In school	19.2	.18***	.10
Education (3)	Elem	College +	27.3	.25***	.18***
Prestige (8)	Low	High	48.2	.17***	.15***
Income (8)	Under $6000	$25000 +	19.1	.17***	.08
Politics					
Party ID (10)	Strong Demo	Weak Demo	19.2	.16***	.11*
Pol views (10)	Conserv	Extreme lib	33.7	.16***	.10*
Religion					
Affiliation (2)	Protestant	Jewish	50.9	.27***	.16***
Attendance (1)	Weekly +	Never	38.7	.31***	.19***
Intensity (4)	Strong	Not strong	36.3	.23***	.12**

SOURCE: National Opinion Research Center (1983).
* = .05 level; ** = .01 level; *** = .001 level: *F*-test.

Table 2. Background Differences in Suicide Attitudes Adjusted for Civil Libertarianism and Prolife Support, 1982

Variable	Unadjusted Difference	Percent Reduction in Unadjusted Difference Due to: Civil Libertarianism	Prolife Support	Both Variables
Demographics				
Age	.57***	82.5***	47.4***	86.0
Race	.28**	32.1	32.1*	53.6
Sex	.17**	47.1	11.8*	47.1
Marital status	.61***	60.7**	39.3**	54.1**
Residence				
City size	.39***	46.2*	46.2*	71.7
Region	.57***	19.3***	40.4	43.9
SES				
Work status	.56***	60.7	12.5*	33.9
Education	.78***	62.8***	41.0***	85.9*
Prestige	1.10***	39.1**	1.8***	28.2***
Income	.58***	60.3	44.8*	74.1
Politics				
Party ID	.57***	35.1	31.6**	50.9
Political views	.85***	35.3*	36.5**	28.2*
Religion				
Affiliation	1.13***	−1.8***	32.7***	23.0***
Attendance	1.04***	11.5***	38.5***	43.2***
Intensity	.50***	26.0***	72.0***	72.0

SOURCE: National Opinion Research Center (1983).
* = .05; ** = .01; *** .001: *F*-test. Statistical significance of the difference in suicide attitudes remaining after adjusting for the test variable(s).

Results

DEMOGRAPHIC CORRELATES

Table 1 summarizes our results for the fifteen sociodemographic correlates. The first column identifies each correlate and ranks (in parentheses) it in terms of its strength of association with the 5-point suicide index. Columns two and three indicate which subgroups show the greatest and least opposition to suicide. The fourth column shows the percentage difference in opposition levels between each pair of subgroups. (Thus, for example, the difference in opposition between 30- to

39-year-olds and those over 65 is (3.57 − 3.00) / 3.00, or 19%.) The last two columns show the strength of association (as measured by eta for zero-order relationships and beta for partial relationships) and significance level for each relationship when each correlate is considered alone (unadjusted column) and after it is adjusted for other sociodemographic correlates (adjusted column).

To summarize, women are more opposed to suicide than men, as are nonwhites, widow/ers, and the elderly; gender (eta = .07) and race (eta = .08), however, are weakly correlated at best. Rural residents and those living in the South Central and South Atlantic states also show greater opposition than respondents residing in other areas. Among socioeconomic characteristics, housekeepers and retirees are the most opposed (with respect to employment status), along with poorly educated, low income, and low status respondents. Along with those who describe their political views as "conservative," "strong" Democrats are less tolerant of suicide than any other political group. Finally, suicide is more strongly proscribed by Protestants, Catholics, frequent church attenders, and those with strong religious preferences.

MEDIATING INFLUENCES

Of the five mediating influences considered in our analysis, neither life satisfaction (eta = .06) nor anomia (eta = .05) is statistically associated (at the .05 level) with suicide attitudes, and the effect of social participation (eta = .10, $p < .05$), which was small to begin with, completely disappears after controlling for sociodemographic differences. Table 2 shows the effects of controlling for civil libertarianism (eta = .33; $p < .001$) and prolife support (eta = .43, $p < .001$), both of which were found to be strongly associated with the 5-point suicide index.

As before, the original association of each sociodemographic correlate is expressed in terms of the "unadjusted" difference in subgroup means between each pair of extreme categories. Thus, for example, the original difference between 30- to 39year-olds and those over 65 is 3.57 − 3.00 = 0.57, or 19%, as shown in Table 1, which is statistically significant at the .001 level. This unadjusted difference is then compared with the difference in subgroup means that remains after controlling first for each attitudinal correlate considered by itself and then in conjunction with the others. Thus, to continue the previous example, controlling for civil libertarianism reduces the unadjusted difference between 30- to 39-year-olds and those over 65 by 82.5%, from 0.57 to 0.10 (the latter of which is not statistically significant at the .05 level), while controlling for prolife support produces a 47.4% reduction. Together, the two factors reduce the original difference by fully 86%.

Except for racial differences, civil libertarianism (C-L) does a much-better job of explaining *demographic variations* in suicide attitudes than does prolife support (P-S). In addition to the 83% reduction in age differences already noted, controlling for C-L reduces gender differences by 47% (versus 12% for P-S) and marital status differences (between widow/ers and never marrieds) by 61% (versus 39% for P-S). On the basis of these findings, the increased tolerance for suicide shown by whites, men, singles, and younger Americans would seem to be due, at least partly, to a heightened concern for the civil liberties of suicide victims within these groups. P-S, on the other hand, has a much greater impact on regional differences (40.4% reduction for P-S versus 19.3% for C-L) in suicide attitudes, while differences due to size of residence are equally affected by each factor (46.2% reduction). Thus, Southeasterners seem to oppose suicide on mainly prolife grounds, while rural residents are about equally influenced by civil libertarian and prolife concerns.

Civil libertarianism overshadows prolife support in its impact on *socioeconomic differences* in suicide attitudes. Controlling for C-L reduces employment status differences by 61% (versus 13% for P-S), educational differences by 63% (versus 41% for P-S), job prestige differences by 39% (versus 2% for prolife support), and income differences by 60% (versus 45% for P-S). Thus, civil libertarian concerns seem to be the primary motivating factor behind the increased tolerance of suicide victims shown by students and those who have achieved higher levels of social status, although prolife concerns also play a significant, if somewhat lesser, role in the case of educational and income differences.

Political differences in suicide attitudes appear to be about equally influenced by each factor. C-L reduces the differences between "weak" Democrats and "strong" Democrats by 35%, compared to 32% for P-S, and has an identical impact on the differences between "conservatives" and "extreme liberals," compared to 37% for P-S. Thus, as a political issue, suicide seems to divide the population along both civil libertarian and prolife lines.

Finally, as might be expected, prolife beliefs have a much greater impact than C-L on *religious differences* in suicide attitudes. The reduction due to prolife support is 33% in the case of Protestant–Jewish differences (versus a 2% reduction for C-L—i.e., the original difference widens when C-L is controlled), 39% for "frequent church attenders" versus "nonattenders" (compared to 12% for C-L), and 72% for those with "strong" versus "weak" religious preferences (compared to 26% for C-L). Thus, moral beliefs about the sanctity of human life would appear to be the principal reason for the relative lack of support

for suicide victims among Protestants, frequent churchgoers, and those with strongly professed religious preferences.

In sum, sociodemographic influences on suicide attitudes seem to be mediated by prolife beliefs as well as civil libertarian values. By contrast, social isolation, life satisfaction, and anomia do not appear to contribute to any of the attitude differences we have found. Civil libertarianism plays a larger role with respect to age, gender, marital status, work status, and SES differences, while the role of prolife beliefs is greater in the case of regional and religious differences. The two factors exert comparable influence in the case of racial, residential, and political differences. Of the 15 sociodemographic correlates considered, all but 6 (marital status, education, prestige, political views, religious affiliation, and church attendance) can be statistically "explained" by the combined effect of C-L and P-S, and of the remaining 6, C-L and P-S together account for nearly 90% of the attitude differences between educational groups, over 50% of the differences due to marital status, 43% of that associated with church attendance, 28% in the case of both "prestige" and "political views," and 23% in the case of "church attendance."

Discussion

Contrary to its popular image as a socially deviant act, suicide is considered an acceptable solution to certain life problems (such as incurable diseases) by nearly half (46%) of the adult population in this country. While aggregate approval rates vary with the type of justification given (bankruptcy, family dishonor, etc.), suicide attitudes seem to be based upon coherent beliefs about the "rightness" or "wrongness" of the act, as evidenced by the tendency of supporters and opponents to maintain their relative positions regardless of the reason a person gives for taking his/her own life. These beliefs in turn vary across sociodemographic lines and closely parallel corresponding differences in prolife and civil libertarian values.

Our findings generally corroborate the results of previous surveys which show greater opposition among nonwhites and rural residents (Gallup, 1978; Ostheimer and Moore, 1982), those living in Central and Southern states (Gallup, 1978; Singh, 1979), Protestants and Catholics, frequent church attenders, and those with "intense" religious preferences (Minear and Brush, 1980). In addition, we have found increased opposition among retirees, widow/ers, low SES respondents, and the elderly as well as "strong" Democrats and political "conservatives."

Among those mediating influences examined, prolife values were

found to play a greater role with respect to regional and religious differences, while civil libertarianism was more influential in the case of demographic (except race, where prolife beliefs had a comparable impact) and socioeconomic differences. For 9 of the 15 sociodemographic variables, the combined effect of both factors was sufficient to explain all existing variations in opposition, thus suggesting the existence of two distinct ideological bases for supporting or opposing a person's right to end his/her own life. The fact, however, that religious differences remain even after these ideological justifications are controlled suggests the possibility of still other moral-ideological arguments for opposing such rights.

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THE POLLS
PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

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Public assistance programs for the poor are the most controversial social welfare issues in the United States. In contrast to Social Security and medical care (cf. Shapiro and Smith, 1985; Shapiro and Young, 1986), many Americans associate these policies with "welfare" fraud and tangled bureaucracies and feel that these programs provide disincentives for employment. They perceive that many single-parent families, blacks, and other minorities are perennially on the welfare rolls. The American public has at best held mixed or ambivalent attitudes toward income assistance, even as the government has done more for the poor (e.g., Patterson, 1981; Hochschild, 1981; McClosky and Zaller, 1984). The public has been very uneasy toward the terms "welfare" or "relief," in contrast to "assistance for the poor" or similar phrases used in survey questions (see the summary in Smith, 1987, this issue). In principle, the public is ready to help those in need and would like to see the gap reduced between the rich and the poor, but in practice they weigh both the pros and the cons of welfare. As a result, the public, for example, has preferred programs such as food stamps to broader policies such as a guaranteed annual income.

Based upon the limited data we have, public preferences (and subgroup differences in them) appear to have been strikingly similar as far back as the first days of survey research in the 1930s (cf. Schiltz, 1970; Erskine, 1975; Shapiro and Patterson, 1986). There was a modest

This is the third in a series of articles on public opinion and social welfare policy.
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liberalizing trend in preferences toward welfare and assistance for blacks in the 1960s (although this is not as fully tracked by the available data as are later opinion shifts), with attitudes toward some issues leveling off or reversing by the early to mid-1970s (approximately 1974; cf. Smith, 1982). This was followed by a conservative shift up to the beginning of the 1980s. From the last half of 1981 through the present there has been a striking liberal rebound, in which opinions appear to have returned to the levels of the period before the conservative shift began in the 1970s. Since the political context and the meaning of the survey research measures of policy preferences (e.g., spending "more" relative to current levels) is different from those of the 1960s and 1970s, we cannot make exact comparisons, but our judgment is that the public is more liberal on these issues than it was when Jimmy Carter left office. It has reacted against the Reagan administration's social welfare policies and especially the spending reductions, some of which, as is often forgotten, began under Carter (i.e., slowing the rate of increase), and were consistent with the conservative movement of opinion during the mid- to late-1970s.

The liberal rebound in opinion had occurred by the time the economy bottomed out during the recession. The loss of jobs, which was the consequence of reducing inflation, increased the public's demands on government, as did the 6% cut in federal public aid expenditures from 1981 to 1982 (in current dollars, as calculated from U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1986:354, table 593). The shift in opinion is unequivocal, although it has apparently tapered off. Moreover, there is far from a consensus toward assistance for the poor, and the public has not shifted back fully toward redistribution. The public is more supportive of doing *something* about income inequality than it was a few years ago, but its renewed support for maintaining or expanding social welfare activity may not indicate a commensurate increase in support for strong measures to narrow the gap between the rich and poor. More so than in the past, it appears that opinion has also shifted to a middle ground (represented by a middle response category in survey items) in which citizens want both the government and individuals to take responsibility for dealing with economic hardships.

The belief that government's responsibility should not be complete need not prevent the further growth of American social welfare programs, although these policies may continue to be limited. The Reagan administration has helped to show, through its (reluctant) acceptance of government's current functions and responsibilities, what the role of government should continue to be in providing public assistance—certainly like its active role in economic and environmental regulation (Shapiro and Gillroy, 1984; Gillroy and Shapiro, 1986), which has substantial public support. Just as the Eisenhower and Nixon admin-

istrations provided Republican legitimacy for the foundation and expansion of the American welfare state, the Reagan administration (despite intentions of dismantling much of it) has evoked the acceptance (even by conservative segments of the public) of government's substantial responsibility for economic welfare.

The survey questions reported here were taken from the files of the Policy Change and Public Opinion Change Project at NORC (originally supported by the National Science Foundation, grant #SES-7912969 A01). These data were compiled from published and unpublished sources, and with the assistance of the Roper Center, University of Connecticut; the Louis Harris Data Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, University of Michigan; and the NORC Library. Further information about these data can be obtained from the appropriate archive or survey organization. The national cross-section sample sizes are at least 1000 unless noted otherwise.

ABC/WP—American Broadcasting Company/*Washington Post*
CBS—Columbia Broadcasting System
CRI—Cambridge Reports, Inc., including *America Looks Ahead*. Cambridge: Cambridge Reports, 1985.
GALLUP—Gallup Polls, American Institute for Public Opinion
HARRIS—Louis Harris and Associates
LAT—*Los Angeles Times*
NYT/CBS—*New York Times*/Columbia Broadcasting System
NORC—NORC, University of Chicago
NORC–GSS—NORC's General Social Surveys
ROPER—Roper Organization
SRC/CPS—Survey Research Center/Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan, American National Election Studies
TRENDEX—Trendex, Inc./General Electric Quarterly Index of Company Relations. NB: Samples drawn from telephone directories, not RDD.

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General Support

ROPER, GALLUP, LAT: Do you think the government should provide for all people who have no other means of obtaining a living?

	Gallup		*Roper*			*LAT*
	7/38[a]	*3/40*	*11/46*	*1/47*	*11/48*	*2/83*[b]
Yes, favor	68%	65%	72%	73%	73%	83%
No, oppose	28	28	19	19	19	11
Depends, No opinion	4	7	9	8	8	4
Not aware	—	—	—	—	—	2

[a] Do you think it is the government's responsibility to pay the living expenses of needy people who are out of work?

[b] Generally speaking are you in favor of the government helping people who are unable to support themselves, or are you opposed to that—or haven't you heard enough about that yet to say?

HARRIS: Now let me read you some statements about welfare that some people have made. For each, tell me if you tend to agree or disagree. . . . It's not right to let people who need welfare to go hungry.

	2/76	*4/77*
Agree	94%	94%
Disagree	4	4
Not sure	2	2

. . . Too many people on welfare could be working.

	2/76	*4/77*
Agree	89%	92%
Disagree	7	6
Not sure	4	2

. . . Too many women whose husbands have left them with several children have no choice but to go on welfare.

	2/76	*4/77*
Agree	74%	73%
Disagree	22	23
Not sure	4	5

. . . Too many people on welfare cheat by getting money they are not entitled to.

	2/76	*4/77*
Agree	86%	89%
Disagree	9	6
Not sure	6	5

. . . The federal government has a deep responsibility for seeing to it that the poor are taken care of, that no one goes hungry, and that every person achieves a minimum standard of living.

	1975	*1976*	*1977*[a]
Agree	68%	66%	71%
Disagree	27	27	20
Not sure	5	7	8

[a] Do you feel that government has a basic responsibility to help families who have no means of support by giving them enough money to meet their minimum needs, or don't you feel that way?

NORC–GSS: I'd like to talk with you about issues some people tell us are important. Please look at card 00. Some people think the government in Washington should do everything possible to improve the standard of living of all poor Americans; they are at point 1 on this card. Other people think it is not the government's responsibility, and that each person should take care of himself; they are at point 5. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you made up your mind on this?

	2–4/75	*2–4/83*	*2–4/84*	*2–4/86*
1. Government	29%	26%	17%	18%
2.	10	19	11	12
3. Agree with both	35	32	46	45
4.	10	10	14	11
5. People	13	10	8	11
6. Don't know	3	4	3	2

NYT/CBS: In your opinion, do you think that most people who receive money from welfare could get along without it if they tried, or do you think most of them really need help?

	1/80	*1/86*
Get along without	51%	40%
Really need help	39	35
Half and half (vol)	—	20
DK/NA	10	4

NYT/CBS, ABC/WP: There were many government programs created in the 1960s to try to improve the conditions of poor people in this country. Do you think these programs generally made things better, made things worse, or do you think they didn't have much impact one way or the other?

	NYT/CBS				ABC/WP[a]
	1/78	*11/80*	*11/84*	*1/86*	*2/86*
Made better	31%	30%	41%	39%	44%
Made worse	14	20	19	18	18
Not much impact	46	42	29	38	34
DK/NA	9	8	12	6	4

[a] In the 1960's and 1970's, the government began a number of assistance programs for poor people. Generally speaking, do you think those programs helped poor people, hurt poor people, or didn't make any difference one way or the other?

Government Spending

NORC–GSS: We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. First, . . . are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on . . . Welfare.

	2–4/73	*2–4/74*	*2–4/75*	*2–4/76*	*2–4/77*	*2–4/78*
Too little	20%	22%	23%	13%	12%	13%
About right	24	32	29	22	23	25
Too much	51	42	43	60	60	58
Don't know	4	4	5	4	5	4
	2–4/80	*2–4/82*	*2–4/83*	*2–4/84*	*2–4/85*	*2–4/86*
Too little	13%	20%	21%	24%	19%	22%
About right	26	28	28	33	33	34
Too much	57	48	47	40	45	40
Don't know	4	4	4	3	4	4
				N = 484	*N* = 749	*N* = 726

ROPER: Same as NORC–GSS question wording, preceding.

	10/71	*12/73*	*12/74*	*12/75*	*12/76*	*12/77*
Too much	53%	48%	49%	53%	59%	58%
Too little	18	18	19	17	13	15
About right	19	24	23	22	21	20
Don't know	11	9	9	9	7	7
	12/78	*12/79*	*12/80*	*12/81*	*12/82*	*12/83*
Too much	60%	57%	58%	52%	45%	43%
Too little	13	13	16	20	22	20
About right	20	25	21	23	26	31
Don't know	6	5	6	5	7	6

CRI: Thinking ahead to next year, I'd like you to tell me in which area you would like to see government spending decreased most.

	Q3 77	*Q3 78*	*Q4 79*	*Q4 80*	*Q4 81*	*Q4 82*	*Q4 83*	*Q4 84*
Welfare	19%	27%	22%	21%	18%	9%	11%	9%

NOTE: "Q" refers to quarter.

ABC/WP: I'm going to mention several general categories on which the federal government spends money. After each, please tell me whether you feel spending for it should be increased, decreased, or left about the same. . . . the poor.

	2/81	*12/82*[a]	*7/83*
Increased	49%	62%	67%
Decreased	15	8	6
Left about same	33	28	26

[a] On another matter, I'm going . . . programs for the poor.

CRI: Some people have argued that President Reagan's budget reductions are cutting too deeply into social programs that help poor and disadvantaged people. Do you generally agree or disagree that President Reagan has cut too much from these programs?

	Q2/81	*Q3/81*	*Q4/81*	*Q1/82*	*Q1/83*	*Q1/84*
Agree	47%	47%	56%	57%	56%	54%
(He's cut too little)	3	4	5	6	5	2
Disagree	39	38	32	31	31	31
Don't know	11	12	7	6	8	10

(If respondent agrees that President Reagan's budget reductions are cutting too deeply into social programs) What particular programs do you think have been cut too much?

	Q3/81	*Q1/82*	*Q1/83*	*Q1/84*
Welfare, aid to dependent families, aid to poor	11%	18%	16%	18%
. . . Food stamp program	5	7	4	9

NOTE: "Q" refers to quarter.

LAT: Do you approve or disapprove of President Reagan's proposal to reduce spending on social services? Do you feel strongly about that, or not so strongly?

	4/81	*1/82*	*11/82*[a]	*12/83*[a]	1/85[a]
Strongly approve	33%	24%	20%	19%	16%
Approve	24	19	17	21	20
Disapprove	16	15	21	22	21
Strongly disapprove	21	32	33	30	36
Not sure	6	9	8	7	7
Refused	0	1	1	1	0

[a] Generally speaking, do you approve or disapprove of President Reagan's proposals to reduce spending on social services?

Redistribution and Guaranteed Income

TRENDEX: Do you think that the difference between the income of the rich and the poor in this country is much too great, somewhat too great, or as it should be?

	1–2/82	*7–8/82*
Much too great	48%	49%
Somewhat too great	22	23
As it should be	27	25
DK,NA	3	2

HARRIS: Now do you favor or oppose. . . . Using the federal government to try to make a fairer distribution of wealth in the country?

		Voters
	8/76	*10/76*
Favor	41%	38%
Oppose	43	47
Not sure	16	15

NORC, NORC–GSS: Some people think that the government in Washington ought to reduce the income differences between the rich and the poor, perhaps by raising the taxes of wealthy families or by giving income assistance to the poor. Others think that the government should not concern itself with reducing the income differences between the rich and the poor. . . . Here is a card with a scale from 1 to 7. Think of a score of 1 as meaning that the government ought to reduce the income differences between rich and the poor, and a score of 7 meaning that the government should not concern itself with reducing income differences. What score between 1 and 7 comes closest to the way you feel?

		NORC		*NORC–GSS*				
		12/73	*2–4/78*	*2–4/78**	*2–4/80*	*2–4/83*	*2–4/84*	*2–4/86*
Gov't should do	1.	36%	19%	18%	17%	20%	21%	23%
	2.	12	11	8	9	11	12	9
	3.	10	17	19	16	16	15	17
	4.	11	21	22	20	17	17	21
	5.	6	11	11	12	11	13	11
	6.	7	8	8	7	8	8	6
Gov't shouldn't do	7.	15	12	11	16	14	12	12
Don't know		3	1	2	3	2	2	1

* "... the income differences between the rich and poor should be reduced. . . ."

GALLUP: It has been proposed that instead of relief and welfare payments, the government should guarantee every family a minimum annual income. Do you favor or oppose this idea?

	9/65	*5/68*
Favor	20%	28%
Oppose	67	62
No opinion	14	9
		N = 868

GALLUP: As you may know, there is talk about giving every family an income of at least $3200 a year, which would be the amount for a family of four. If the family earns less than this, the government would make up the difference. Would you favor or oppose such a plan?

	5/68	*12/68*
Favor	36%	32%
Oppose	58	62
No opinion	6	6

HARRIS, CBS: Now let me ask you about some of the points in that proposal to change the welfare system. For each, tell me if you tend to agree or disagree with that specific proposal. . . . The federal government should provide a basic income of $1,600 for each family of four on welfare.

	HARRIS *9/69*	*CBS* *10/70*[a]
Agree	58%	47%
Disagree	42	53

[a] It's been proposed that all families in America be guaranteed a minimum income. For example, a family of four would be guaranteed $1600 a year. If the family couldn't earn $1600, the government would make up the difference. Would you favor or oppose a program for guaranteed income?

Food Stamps

GALLUP: A U.S. Senator has proposed that the government give free food stamps to all families whose earnings are under twenty dollars a week. Do you favor or oppose such a proposal?

	August 1939[a]	*March 1969*
Favor	62%	68%
Oppose	27	25
No opinion	11	7

[a] The government has tried out a food stamp plan which lets people on relief buy certain surplus farm products below their regular selling price. The government makes up the difference to the merchant. Do you approve or disapprove of this plan?

GALLUP: Would you favor or oppose giving food stamps at a greatly reduced rate to families whose earnings are twenty to sixty dollars a week?

	August 1939[a]	*March 1969*
Favor	57%	60%
Oppose	43	31
No opinion	—	9

[a] Would you approve of extending this plan to families earning less than $20 a week as well as to persons on relief?

NYT/CBS: If you had a say in making up the federal budget this year, which programs would *you* like to see increased and which reduced? Should federal spending on . . . food stamps . . . be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?

	1/81	*4/81*
Increased	11%	12%
Decreased	47	50
Kept the same	36	33
No opinion	6	5

LAT: If more government services have to be cut back, would you favor cutting back on federal benefits like food stamps, or would you prefer some other kind of cutback?

	1/82	*1/84*[a]
Favor	56%	38%
Other	42	58
Not sure	2	4

[a] Would you favor cutting back on the food stamp program, or would you rather consider some other way to cut government expenses, instead?

ABC/WP: I'd like to ask about some specific federal government programs. For each, please tell me whether you feel spending for that program should be increased, decreased, or left about the same. . . . Food stamps.

	1981	*1986*
Spend about the same	33%	48%
Increase	15	18
Decrease	49	32
No opinion	3	2

Assistance for Blacks and Minorities

ROPER: There are many problems facing our nation today. But at certain times some things are more important than others, and need more attention from our federal government than others. (Card shown respondent) I'd like to know for each of the things on this list whether you think it is something the government should be making a major effort on now, or something the government should be making some effort on now, or something not needing any particular government effort now. . . . Trying to solve the problems caused by ghettos, race, and poverty.

	6/74	*6/75*	*6/76*	*6/77*	*6/78*	*6/79*
Major effort	60%	59%	60%	66%	55%	49%
Some effort	28	29	29	27	31	39
Needs no particular effort	9	9	8	5	10	9
Don't know	3	4	3	3	4	3

	6/80	*6/81*	*6/82*	*6/83*	*6/84*
Major effort	56%	53%	50%	55%	57%
Some effort	34	34	38	34	33
Needs no particular effort	10	9	8	8	8
Don't know	3	3	3	3	3

NORC/GSS: We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. First, . . . are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on . . . Improving the conditions of blacks.

	2–4/73	*2–4/74*	*2–4/75*	*2–4/76*	*2–4/77*	*2–4/78*
Too little	33%	31%	27%	27%	25%	24%
About right	39	42	41	41	42	43
Too much	22	21	24	25	25	25
Don't know	6	7	8	7	8	7

	2–4/80	*2–4/82*	*2–4/83*	*2–4/84*	*2–4/85*	*2–4/86*
Too little	24%	28%	29%	35%	31%	34%
About right	44	44	44	43	43	43
Too much	24	20	18	16	20	16
Don't know	8	8	9	6	7	8

SRC/CPS: Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of *Negroes* and other minority groups. Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help minority *peoples* but they should be *expected* to help themselves. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought about this?

	1970	*1972*	*1974*	*1976*	*1978*
1. Gov. help minority groups	15%	13%	14%	13%	12%
2.	8	7	7	9	6
3.	8	13	12	13	10
4.	25	24	24	22	25
5.	12	11	12	12	16
6.	11	12	9	10	12
7. Help themselves	22	19	22	21	19
	4/80[a]	*6/80*[a]	*11/80*[a]	*11/82*[b]	*11/84*[b]
1. Gov. help minority groups	6%	5%	5%	8%	9%
2.	5	4	5	6	8
3.	9	10	12	12	15
4.	24	26	30	30	31
5.	20	17	21	16	18
6.	18	20	13	17	10
7. Help themselves	18	18	14	12	9

[a] . . . blacks . . . , even if it means giving them preferential treatment. Suppose these people are at one end of the scale at point number 1. Others. . . . Suppose these people are at the other end at point 7. And of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between at points 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. Where . . .

[b] . . . blacks. . . . (Suppose these people are at one end of the scale at point number 1.) Others . . . help minorities because they should help themselves. (Suppose these people are at the other end at point 7. And of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between at points 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6.)

NORC–GSS: Now look at card RR (below). Some people think that (blacks/Negroes) have been discriminated against for so long that the government has a special obligation to help improve their living standards. Others believe that the government should not be giving special treatment to (blacks/Negroes). . . . I strongly agree the government is obligated to help blacks, I agree with both answers, I strongly agree that the government shouldn't give special treatment.

	1975	*1983*	*1984*	*1986*
1. Government help	16%	8%	9%	8%
2.	8	9	9	10
3. Agree with both	21	26	30	29
4.	12	20	17	18
5. No special treatment	40	33	30	33
6. Don't know	3	4	4	3

NOTE

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